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Corporate Services
Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch

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Review of the Communications Function

Project 97/22
October 1999

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101-01652/

Executive Summary

Background

The department's communications function operates in a politically turbulent and continually evolving context. In recent years, significant changes have occurred in the government's relationship with Aboriginal peoples and northerners, in the activities and mandate of the department, and its relations with other federal departments and levels of government. The requirement for fiscal accountability; the process of downsizing, restructuring and public service renewal have also presented major challenges for the communications function.

The federal response to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples — set out in *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* — is the current framework for federal-Aboriginal relations. Several other departments also deal with Aboriginal peoples (e.g., Health Canada, Canadian Heritage, Human Resources Development Canada, Natural Resources, Justice, Solicitor General, Finance, Revenue Canada, Fisheries and Oceans, Environment, the Privy Council Office and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians).

The wide diversity in the circumstances and aspirations of First Nations and Inuit in different regions of the country also contributes to create a highly complex communications environment and makes it extremely difficult to develop a consistent departmental or governmental position across Canada.

On the northern policy side, the situation is also complex and rapidly changing. The division of the Northwest Territories (NWT) and the creation of Nunavut has altered the geographical and political map of Canada. The transition will involve a period of some uncertainty along with exciting innovation and many new communications challenges. There is a growing realization of the need for Canada to articulate both domestic and international policies related to the North.

In all of this, it is clear that communication in Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's (DIAND) context cannot be a simple matter of getting information and messages out effectively. It also involves active listening, meaningful dialogue, and proactive two-way communication that reflects basic principles of openness, transparency, partnership and mutual respect.

While each of these factors on its own may be sufficient to warrant an examination of the communications function, the combination of these factors provided a compelling impetus for a thorough examination to ensure that the communications function is providing the most effective and efficient support to the department as a whole.

During the conduct of the review, the communications function was viewed as described in the Treasury Board Manual: "Communications is a management function which ensures that the public receives information about government policies, programs and services, and that the concerns and interests of the public are taken into account in the formulation and implementation of government policies and programs."

At DIAND, the responsibility to manage the communication function is divided between headquarters and the Regional Offices. At headquarters, the Communications Branch operates under a Director General who reports to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Strategic Direction. The Director General provides functional guidance to the regions.

In the regions, the communications function is typically managed by a Director of Executive Services who, in addition to executive services staff, has anywhere from three or four to upwards of a dozen communications staff, headed by a senior communications manager.

Objective, Scope and Methodology

The terms of reference for the review were approved by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee in October 1997. From the outset, the review was approached as a joint undertaking of the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch (DAEB) and Communications Branch (CB).

The review sought to address a number of issues including the following key questions:

- what is the current structure of the corporate communications function in headquarters and in the regions?
- what is the current state of affairs in the Communications Branch and in the regions?
- are the Communications Branch and the regions in a position to meet the challenges resulting from the major shift in DIAND's management culture — devolution, partnership, Public Service Renewal, leadership initiative, risk management?
- how can the Communications Branch and the regions be better equipped to deal with the numerous challenges they are facing?
- are there any structural improvements required for the Communications Branch and the regions to more effectively address and respond to current needs and to anticipate future needs?

The review of the communications function was designed to contribute to an understanding of the current and emerging needs and operating environment of the function, and how it can be organized, staffed, oriented and managed in a continuously relevant and effective manner. The review involved all communications activities including those at headquarters, all regional communications services, including Indian Oil and Gas Canada (IOGC), the Federal Treaty Negotiations Office (FTNO) and the Nunavut Office. This includes the relationships between communications officials, policy and program staff on the one hand, and a diverse array of clients, partners, and stakeholders on the other.

The review was conducted by a multi disciplinary team of senior consultants. The team included professionals with backgrounds in communications, public and business administration, policy planning, evaluation, social market research, economics, sociology and politics.

The primary source of information was individual interviews and focus groups. Interviews in the department took place at headquarters and in regions with senior managers, communications managers and staff, and other managers and staff. Outside the department, interviews were also carried out with managers of central agencies and other departments, with representatives of aboriginal groups and media, and with non-aboriginal media. All in all, some 200 people were interviewed individually and in groups. The review fieldwork took place between May and September 1998. All regions were visited.

General Assessment

The strategic direction, based on authoritative, comprehensive, clear goals, is lacking. It requires strengthening to ensure more effective operation of the communications function within the department. This weakness is at the root of a number of challenges to an effective communications function within the department. In addition, some imbalance exists between business lines, and there is a need to clarify commitments and expectations vis-à-vis clients and partners. On the positive side, communications management and staff are regarded as competent, dedicated and committed to the organization.

Key Review Findings

Strategic Direction

DIAND's communications function needs stronger strategic direction. There is little evidence that the department has a regular process, directed by senior management and well understood by staff and partners for formulating and promulgating communications goals. The lack of authoritative, comprehensive, clear goals — the foundation of strategic direction — is at the root of the majority of challenges to an effective communications function within the department.

Communications Branch and regional communications units have a tendency to respond, more or less indiscriminately, to the numerous requests for their services that they receive from many quarters. They operate in a "crisis management mode" largely as a reflection of a lack of a clear strategic direction. When responding to these "crises", they consume significant resources in areas that may have little to do with previously agreed upon goals and objectives. Operating constantly in such a mode is not sustainable over the long term. Conversely, the lack of clear communications goals leaves communications staff with a shaky foundation from which to negotiate and discuss inappropriate demands for assistance with policy and program units.

Many managers and staff said they were aware of documents such as the department's *1998-1999 Corporate Strategic Communications Plan*, but few, if any, indicated that they used the document to guide their day-to-day communications activities. Regions do not, as a rule, use the *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan* as the foundation for their own plans, and, in a majority of regions, there is little evidence that locally- or nationally-generated communications plans were used to guide day-to-day communications activities.

The interdepartmental mechanisms for formulating and implementing communications policies for Aboriginal affairs are weak. The department's mandate for northern issues also involves many other federal departments. Some sort of interdepartmental mechanisms to coordinate communications with respect to the federal role in Canada's North is highly desirable given the importance of projecting stable and consistent messages during a period of significant change.

Since strengthening strategic direction in communications is a collective responsibility of senior management — not just that of the Communications Branch — senior management would need to take the lead on this issue. A process for formulating the department's communications goals should provide for broad involvement of communications staff, policy and program staff, as well as partners and clients. The process should also support the systematic operationalization of the goals.

Mandate and Business Lines

The mandate of the Communications Branch and regional units appears to be reasonably well understood. Among communications personnel, there appeared to be some uncertainty as to how far the department's mandate extends in communicating the government's broader objectives with respect to Métis, non-status and off-reserve Indians south of 60. This needs to be clarified.

Many respondents thought that program managers underestimated the importance and value of the services provided by the Communications Branch and regional units. There was also some concern that communications personnel did not have enough regular and sustained access to senior management. The problem of visibility and "clout" is particularly acute in those regions where the communications manager does not sit on the management committee in that region.

The locus of responsibility for tracking emerging issues within Communications Branch and regional units is not clear. It is understood to be a shared responsibility, but there is a lot of confusion about mechanisms for communicating these issues to senior managers at headquarters. The provision of services by the Communications Services Management Directorate was recognized as an area of strength. The directorate received high praise from all quarters for the quality and timeliness of their products. Nevertheless, most of the program managers felt that there was too much time spent on producing information products, at the expense of providing strategic advice and planning.

Public education was generally seen as a high priority and an appropriate new element in the communications mandate. This business line enjoys considerable interest and support amongst all stakeholders. Although the branch is making efforts to give it more profile and the importance of the public education business line is widely accepted, there is no clarity about what this entails and where the emphasis should be placed. The public education will need to be more aggressively marketed to ensure that all programs in headquarters and the regions, as well as other departments dealing with Aboriginal and northern issues, are aware of its importance, and become involved in a timely fashion in planning and delivering communications activities on relevant policy and program initiatives.

Senior managers were conscious of the fact that they were also responsible for effective communications. Several senior managers reported that they involved communications staff in the development of new policies and programs. However, this is not a consistent pattern. Managers need to make more effort to ensure that communications staff have an opportunity to provide strategic advice early on in the process. Too often communications issues are an after-thought.

Feedback from internal and external clients shows that there is a clearly-articulated demand and strong support for the current mandate and range of business lines, although the relative importance of these needs vary. The key concern is appropriate emphasis for each business line, in particular the relative emphasis to be paid to "communications support services" versus "strategic communications advice."

Working Relationships

The communications function has many diverse clients and potential partners. However, the specific commitments and expectations vis-à-vis each distinct "client" or "partner" are not well mapped out. A systematic articulation of roles, responsibilities and service commitments may facilitate better use of limited communications resources and minimize conflicts, uncertainties in delivery and coordination, while at the same time promoting the skills and capacities of departmental communications personnel.

It is clear that the Minister is generally regarded as the primary client for communications purposes. Minister's Office staff reported that they were generally satisfied with the service they are getting, with the notable exception of speeches.

The frequency and degree to which communications personnel at headquarters and in the regions have established good rapport and effective working relationships with other DIAND units is highly variable, reflecting different understandings on the part of policy and program units about the value-added that communications personnel can bring to bear on policy and program initiatives, and probably different "chemistries" on a personal level between communications and policy/program personnel. Communications personnel at both headquarters and in the regions said that they often have to pick up the slack for poor communications between managers and other departments on substantive issues. There is a tendency for some programs to relegate the

Communications Branch's role in headquarters to relatively mundane — and frequently last-minute — crunching out of basic information pieces such as press releases and fact sheets, rather than more critical things such as analysis of public environments, identification and development of core messages, development of strategies for public and stakeholder engagement. The situation is similar in most regions.

There is also a general consensus among headquarters and regional communications personnel that the overall openness and quality of their own working relationships — traditionally strained and confrontational — is steadily improving, largely as a result of recent efforts to establish regular contact through teleconferences and joint planning/review sessions. Regions feel that they still spend too much time and effort "feeding mechanisms in headquarters"; they feel pulled in too many directions on too many issues and consider that they are most often an afterthought when it comes to planning and developing communications strategies and programs.

There appears to be a genuine commitment on the part of departmental communications personnel to pursue and sustain relationships with other key players based on these characteristics and qualities. Formal communications with First Nations and Inuit partners need to be established. Regional communications staff, in particular, need to become more aware of key contacts in their community. To do so, they need to have officers in the field on a day-to-day basis. DIAND also needs to work to better understand how First Nations and Inuit organizations work.

Several Aboriginal representatives remarked on potential obstacles to effective partnerships. They complained that DIAND is always trying to pre-package messages on key initiatives, yet the right "spin" for DIAND is not always the right spin for First Nations, and it is sometimes offensive to Aboriginal people. There is a significant difference in perceptions about the effectiveness of communications relationships with Aboriginal organizations. While communications staff at headquarters and in the regions feel that they enjoy a reasonably good relationship, the Aboriginal representatives quite consistently stated that they did not feel like partners in the process. It is important to note that this general view was not evident in the North — in the Yukon, in the and the NWT especially in Nunavut where, by all accounts, there are particularly close, cooperative and effective working relationships.

Other departments and levels of government are important external clients, yet linkages are generally poor. The interdepartmental committee process is not considered effective by the participants interviewed; this is part of a larger government-wide problem, generally recognized by other departments as well.

Staff Skills, Tools and Capacities

Departmental communication staff are generally regarded as competent, dedicated and committed to serving clients well. This opinion is widely shared inside and outside the department, even when people were critical of the quality of departmental products, services or procedures.

The Communications Branch and most of the regions have a strong foundation in professional, dedicated staff. Departmental communications' capacity could be strengthened by managing the overall workload in ways that would allow communications staff to maintain and increase their professional qualifications and help policy and program staff and partners to assume an increasing share of the responsibility for effective communications. In several regions communications staff said they thought that they needed higher professional qualifications and greater experience than they possessed.

Systems and Procedures

Efforts to strengthen the formal planning and coordination processes for the communications function across headquarters and the regions have been undertaken recently and should be continued with more involvement of policy and program managers, as well as partners. More emphasis could also be given to evaluation programs for communications. The absence of an authoritative, practical plan complicates the development of authoritative systems and procedures that depend on it.

A pragmatic approach, focussed on concrete issues such as approval processes for press releases and other routine documents could help to improve specific systems and procedures as well as contributing to improvements in the overall relationship between the regions and headquarters on communications issues.

Organization and Resources

The current organization of the Communications Branch is considered to be satisfactory for carrying out its current and foreseeable responsibilities, including those arising out of *Gathering Strength*.

To give the communications function more visibility and authority, many communications staff thought that the Communications Branch head should report directly to the Deputy Minister. The head of the branch needs to be seen as the department's principal advisor on the communications function and a member of the senior management team.

Resources allocated to the Communications Branch and to some regional communications units may be less than adequate to meet current responsibilities. Clearer communications goals and a more appropriate sharing of responsibilities between departmental communications staff on the one hand and partners, policy and program staff on the other could help increase the impacts of available resources.

Key Recommendations

1. The Director General of Communications should establish regular processes — conducted at least once a year, under the direction of senior management — for:

   a) ascertaining and influencing the government's communications objectives and priorities (e.g., through a combination of strengthened interdepartmental mechanisms and by proposing communications goals and strategies to PCO/PMO).

   b) involving communications, policy and program staff at headquarters (including the Minister's Office) and regions, in the formulation of DIAND's communications goals in the light of overall departmental goals and priorities and the government's overall communications goals and priorities.

   c) involving partners and clients in the formulation of communications goals.

   d) approving, promulgating and operationalizing the department's communications goals and priorities.

   e) assessing achievement of agreed goals and priorities, in consultation with partners, in light of agreed criteria.

   f) providing the basis for assessing annually the contribution of staff involved with the communications function to the achievement of the department's communications goals.

2. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with senior management and the Minister's Office, should establish priorities among business lines clearly linked to departmental communications goals.

4. The Director General of Communications, in consultation/collaboration with programs at headquarters and the regions, and with Aboriginal and northern partners, should develop a clear vision for the public education function, with goals, planning and evaluation processes, resourcing priorities/criteria, and related delivery and coordination mechanisms.

6. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the regions, should increase the number of opportunities for face-to-face interaction between headquarters and regional staff to share experience and expertise.

8. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the programs at headquarters and the regions, and with Aboriginal partners, should clarify relationships with Aboriginal organizations and stakeholders particularly with respect of what is meant by "partnership" as it relates to the communications mandate. This would include a common understanding of areas of collaboration and areas of independence.

9. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the regions, should develop a longer term training and skill development strategy combining formal and informal approaches, including staff rotations at and between/amongst headquarters and the regions.

12. The Director General of Communications should establish mechanisms to engage communications personnel, other departmental managers and stakeholders in planning, coordination and evaluation processes on an ongoing basis, reflecting the commitment to partnerships and shared responsibility for communications within the department and the federal government.

15. The Director General of Communications should encourage the regions to provide more informal briefings for local media, thus obviating the need for as many press releases to support establishing closer relationships with the media and a more personal, less bureaucratic approach to proactive media relations.

20. The Director General of Communications should suggest to senior management a requirement that all proposals for new or expanded programs, projects and similar initiatives be accompanied with an estimate of the demand on communications resources and, when required, an identification of the source of additional funding.

Section 1 - Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of a review carried out for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) from April to October 1998. It is based on the review team's analysis of background materials and of interviews and workshops conducted with DIAND officials at headquarters and in every region, DIAND partners and various stakeholders on Aboriginal issues across the country.

Objectives and Scope of the Review

The review of the communications function was designed to contribute to an understanding of the current and emerging needs and operating environment of the function, and how it can be organized, staffed, oriented and managed in a continuously relevant and effective manner. The review involved all communications activities including those at headquarters, all regional communications services, including Indian Oil and Gas Canada (IOGC), the Federal Treaty Negotiations Office (FTNO) and the Nunavut Office. This includes the relationships between communications officials, policy and program staff on the one hand, and a diverse array of clients, partners, and stakeholders on the other.

The terms of reference for the review were approved by the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Committee in October 1997. From the outset, the review was approached as a joint undertaking of the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch (DAEB) and Communications Branch (CB).

The review sought to address a number of issues including the following key questions:

- what is the current structure of the corporate communications function in headquarters and in the regions?
- what is the current state of affairs in the Communications Branch and in the regions?
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- how can the Communications Branch and the regions be better equipped to deal with the numerous challenges they are facing?
- are there any structural improvements required for the Communications Branch and the regions to more effectively address and respond to current needs and to anticipate future needs?

The review called for a description of the organization, activities, management regime, resource utilization, working relationships, accountability mechanisms, and policy and strategic guidance related to the department's communications function. The description also provided the basis for an understanding of key business lines, workload, *modus operandi* and resource utilization.

Of particular interest for examination was the relationships between headquarters and the regions and between communications staff on the one hand, and policy and program staff on the other, and how these relationships might need to be restructured or refined for optimal effectiveness and efficient use of resources. The review also considered the needs, expectations, capacities and circumstances of the key clients and partners concerned with communications.

Section 2 - Approach and Methodology

Approach

The review was conducted by a multidisciplinary team of senior consultants (hereafter called "review team"). The team included professionals with backgrounds in communications, public and business administration, policy planning, evaluation, social market research, economics, sociology and politics.

The review team had regular contact with the "client team" from DIAND, consisting of the Director General, Communications, the A/Director, Strategic Communications, Planning and Public Affairs, the A/Director, Communications Services Management and representatives from the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch who co-sponsored and coordinated the review.

The relationship established between the review team and the DIAND project team was particularly useful in ensuring that the terms of reference were followed, while making practical adjustments to take account of new developments (e.g., the publication of *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*), experience gained in the course of the review and changing priorities.

This review focussed on activities within the mandates of the Communications Branch and the communications units in the regions. The review team recognized that there are a number of dimensions to the communications function such as consultations, ministerial and departmental correspondence, Question Period Cards, departmental use of the Internet, translation services and the departmental library that are not within the mandate of the Communications Branch, nor of most of the regional communications units. The review team did not assessed such dimensions of the communications function. However, where interviews raised issues associated with such dimensions and relevant to the focus of the review, it was taken into account in the development of the findings and recommendations.

Methodology

The communications function review involved three phases: Orientation and Planning; Conduct and Analysis; and Reporting.

Orientation and Planning

Research and Consultation

The review began with the review team performing initial research and interviews with a cross section of key staff within DIAND and with a handful of outside experts and stakeholders to flesh out the picture of how the communications function currently operates, identify issues and concerns, resource utilization, relationships and responsibilities with its clients and partners, and identify additional contacts that should be interviewed in depth.

Upon completion of this initial orientation/planning phase, the review team met with the DIAND team to confirm their initial understanding of the current organization, activities and operations of the communications function, and to establish initial key contacts for regional interviews and participation in workshops. The consultants also prepared a work plan for consideration by the DIAND project team and developed interview/workshop guides to be used in the conduct of the field work.

Interview/workshop Guides

Interview instruments were based on the key questions identified in the terms of reference and further refined through initial informal contacts with key DIAND staff, and with outside specialists and selected stakeholders, the client scoping workshop and other discussions with the DIAND project team. Separate interview/workshop guides were developed for the following key groups:

- DIAND managers and staff in the Communications Branch at headquarters and communications services units in the regions;
- DIAND (headquarters and the regions) ministerial staff and senior program managers;
- DIAND communications, policy and program staff (headquarters and the regions);
- ministerial staff and senior managers in other departments;
- Aboriginal partners and northern stakeholders; and
- media (Aboriginal and mainstream).

The guides consisted of approximately five to fourteen "umbrella" questions posed to each respondent in the six groups identified above. Under each "umbrella" question were several prompts used to guide further exploration of issues raised during the interviews/workshops. Not every prompt was asked of every respondent.

Conduct and Analysis

Using teams of two consultants in each region wherever feasible, the review team visited each of DIAND's Regional Offices where they conducted one-on-one interviews and small group workshops with a cross-section of DIAND personnel, clients, partners and other stakeholders. While the make-up of the interviewees and workshop participants varied from region to region, they included individuals from the following groups:

- Regional Director General and/or Associate Regional Director General;
- communications managers and staff;
- regional policy and program staff;
- representatives from Aboriginal organizations;
- other federal department/provincial agency representatives; and
- Aboriginal and mainstream media representatives.

The review team also conducted interviews and workshops at headquarters in the National Capital Region which included representatives from the following groups:

- DIAND communications staff;
- DIAND communications managers;
- Assistant Deputy Ministers' Offices;
- Deputy Minister's Office;
- Minister's Office, including regional assistants;
- Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians;
- other federal departments and central agencies/interdepartmental committee members; and
- Aboriginal and northern stakeholders.

Overall, a total of more than 200 managers, staff, and stakeholders were consulted during the communications review at headquarters and in the regions.

Reporting

Upon completion of the conduct and analysis phase, the review team presented a progress report and selected highlights to a Regional and headquarters Communications Managers Workshop, held in Ottawa on September 17, 1998. The presentation provided a quick orientation to the nature of findings, and served as a framework for the design and structure of the formal report. Taking into account the directions from this workshop, the review team completed its analysis and developed a series of recommendations for consideration by DIAND. The final format of this report was prepared in consultation with the DIAND project team.

The selection of findings and recommendations presented in this report was influenced by judgments around the feasibility of implementing significant improvements over the medium term and the scope that senior management needs to decide how best to make such improvements. It was also designed to amalgamate into broad categories the many excellent and often detailed suggestions from DIAND staff. The approach was to report the findings and make recommendations that take account of the advices made by staff.

Section 3 - Communications Environment

The Environment of the Communications Function

The communications function within DIAND operates in a politically turbulent and continually evolving context. Over the last several years, change has been occurring on a number of instances — in the government's relationship with Aboriginal peoples, in the activities and mandate of the department, in its relations with other federal departments, in evolving perspectives on, and relationships with, the North, and in the internal structure and organization of DIAND itself.

The constitutional, legal and legislative framework for the federal government's relationship with Aboriginal peoples has been in a state of flux for a long time. On the constitutional aspect, issues relate to the recognition of Aboriginal self-government. Several high profile legal decisions have resulted in significant changes in Aboriginal and Treaty rights, but the legal process is often protracted and the implications of these decisions are not immediately obvious. The *Indian Act* continues to create difficulties in terms of balancing the department's statutory responsibilities, the government's fiduciary obligations and its commitment to promote self-government for First Nations.

The government is frequently involved in litigation concerning Aboriginal and Treaty rights, breaches of statutory provisions in the *Indian Act*, or failure to fulfill its fiduciary responsibility toward Aboriginal peoples. These cases pose problems for communications as the department must reconcile its advocacy role with the positions taken in litigation. Land claims present similar problems since the department has a dual role in resolving these claims. These problems are further compounded by the involvement of third parties who are often questioning both Aboriginal and federal positions.

The government's recognition of an inherent right to self-government for Aboriginal peoples has diffused some of the pressure for constitutional change, but it has not clarified many important issues concerning the jurisdictions and accountability of Aboriginal governments. The process of devolution which has been ongoing for many years continues to generate some ambiguity about the department's accountability for financial and political decisions taken at the community level.

The federal response to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples — set out in *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* — is the current framework for federal-Aboriginal relations. At the same time, it has raised expectations that may be difficult to meet. While the government's commitment to partnerships and to government-to-government relationships with Aboriginal peoples has been well-received, it is still unclear what kind of process will be established to work out the details of the new relationship.

Several other departments also deal with Aboriginal peoples (e.g., Health Canada, Canadian Heritage, Human Resources Development Canada, Natural Resources, Justice, Solicitor General, Finance, Revenue Canada, Fisheries and Oceans, Environment, the Privy Council Office and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians). In order for the government to speak with one voice, it will be increasingly necessary to ensure collaboration between departments to reconcile different perspectives and competing interests.

The wide diversity in the circumstances and aspirations of First Nations and Inuit in different regions of the country creates a highly complex communications environment and makes it extremely difficult to develop a consistent departmental or governmental position across Canada.

On the northern policy side, the situation is also complex and rapidly changing. The division of the NWT and the creation of Nunavut has altered the geographical and political map of Canada. The transition will involve a period of some uncertainty along with exciting innovation and many new communications challenges. There is a growing realization of the need for Canada to articulate both domestic and international policies related to the North. This is underscored by the breadth of recommendations in the 1997 report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on Canada's objectives and circumpolar relationships. The report highlights the complexities of current and emerging northern issues such as the promotion of sustainable development in the North's unique economic and ecosystem "landscape" and the protection and revitalization of northern languages and cultures.

Since these issues require extraordinary commitments — political and financial — and yet are often little understood by southern Canadians, the demands for effective communication are formidable.

In all of this, it is also clear that communication in DIAND's context cannot be a simple matter of getting information and messages out effectively. It also involves active listening, meaningful dialogue, and proactive two-way communication that reflects basic principles of openness, transparency, partnership and mutual respect.

The process of downsizing, restructuring and Public Service Renewal presents additional challenges for the communications function in DIAND. Public Service Renewal calls for a shift away from a command and control organizational environment to one that emphasizes new leadership styles, teamwork, empowering employees, and taking more calculated risks in carrying out day-to-day responsibilities. The Communications Branch is being called upon to make a major transformation in the workplace at the same time that external forces are placing unprecedented demands on the operation of the communications function.

While each of these factors on its own may be sufficient to warrant an examination of the communications function, the combination of these factors provided a compelling impetus for a thorough examination to ensure that the communications function is providing the most effective and efficient support to the department as a whole.

The Communications Function

A first step in understanding the potential impact of the environment is to be clear about what is meant by the communications function. Reproduced below are the main elements of the function, as described in the *Treasury Board Manual*:

"*The communications function*"

Communications is a management function which ensures that the public receives information about government policies, programs and services, and that the concerns and interests of the public are taken into account in the formulation and implementation of government policies and programs. It includes:

- communications research and analysis, which examines the public environment to assess public wants, needs, perceptions and understandings with respect to policies and programs, and evaluates communications programs against planned objectives and professional standards;

- communications advice, which counsels ministers and management on policy development, program planning and implementation, and public issues;

- communications planning, which develops corporate and program communications plans responding to public concerns and integrating major objectives of the government, the minister and the institutions; and

- management of communications which applies the principles and practices of good management to the coordination of research and analysis, to advice and planning, and to the implementation of communications programs and activities.

Institutions are responsible for integrating communications into the corporate management process. They must:

- ensure that communications staff, policy advisors and program managers carry out their shared responsibilities for the management and implementation of government communications [emphasis added];

- ensure an appropriate distribution of resources between headquarters and regions in all communications planning and management;

- prepare a strategic communications plan, in conjunction with their [Departmental Plan] integrating governmental, ministerial and institutional priorities;

- prepare an operational communications plan that translates strategies into activities and identifies resource requirements within the operational budget;

- ensure that accountability is assigned for the approval of all communications projects;
- inform the Privy Council Office of any major adjustments to plans during the course of the fiscal year;
- assess the public environment in relation to policies, programs and major initiatives, and adhere to legal, policy and procedural requirements that apply to public opinion research and other forms of government information collection; and
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of communications activities in relation to objectives stated in communications plans ..."

The communications function can be seen as embracing not only the familiar activities associated with the Communications Branch and regional communications units but also as mentioned, such activities as the management of consultations, the preparation of Question Period cards and the use of the Internet. A broad perspective on the communications function at DIAND is appropriate, particularly since a fundamental role of the department is to foster good relationships between the federal government and Aboriginal peoples and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Good communications are a prerequisite to good relationships.

The Organization of Communication

At DIAND, the responsibility to manage the communication function is divided between headquarters and the Regional Offices. At headquarters, the Communications Branch operates under a Director General who reports to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Strategic Direction. The Director General provides functional guidance to the regions. Reporting to the Director General are the Directors of the two directorates — the Strategic Communications Planning and Public Affairs Directorate and the Communications Services Management Directorate.

In the regions, the communications function is typically managed by a Director of Executive Services who, in addition to executive services staff, has anywhere from three or four to upwards of a dozen communications staff, headed by a senior communications manager. The Communications Manager usually sits on the Regional Management Committee along with the Director of Executive Services. The Director of Executive Services may be a communications professional, but this is the case only in a minority of regions. There is little correlation between the scale and size of any region's operations and the corresponding size of its communications services team and related budget.

The Mandates and Structures

The Communications Branch has a mandate to inform client groups of the department's policies, programs, services and activities; to develop strategies, to provide advice on the communication of ministerial and departmental policies, programs and initiatives; and to provide communications services. It is also responsible for developing and implementing corporate priorities related to public education and incident management. In addition, the branch is now responsible for internal contracting and maintaining distribution and mailing lists.

Strategic Communications Planning and Public Affairs Directorate

The mandate of the Strategic Communications, Planning and Public Affairs Directorate is "to provide proactive, strategic, quality support in the planning, development and implementation of all departmental communications activities." The directorate is primarily responsible for the first four business lines described below.

The directorate is organized along a combination of *substantive portfolio* lines corresponding to six major departmental branches/business lines (one pair for each of three managers), and *strategic focus* lines addressing three cross-cutting perspectives. In total, there are six managers and a complement of 28 full-time equivalents (FTEs):

- Manager, Northern, and Claims;
- Manager, Socio-Economic Policy and Programming, and Lands and Trust Services;
- Manager, Policy and Strategic Direction, and Fiscal Relations;
- Manager, Public Education;
- Manager, Public Affairs; and
- Manager, Strategic Communications.

Under each manager, the complement typically consists of a communications executive and one or more communications officers, sometimes with a specific assigned function or area of responsibility such as ministerial and regional liaison, media monitoring or public environment, but otherwise with a flexible mandate to respond to diverse communications issues and initiatives within the purview of the section.

Communications Services Management Directorate

The mandate of the Communications Services Management Directorate is to "provide quality, professional, technical support to ensure the most effective implementation of the corporate communications program." The Directorate is primarily responsible for the last two business lines listed below.

The directorate, with 19 FTEs, operates under the Manager, Multi-Media, and the Manager, Services, who report to the Director.

The multi-media unit consists of a small number of senior project officers, project officers, distribution officers and a contract administration officer. The services unit consists of a team of English and French writers and editors, and a small unit responsible for internal communications and special projects.

In addition to in-house resources, the branch makes use of a number of consultants and contractors including writers, translators, graphic design and production support, special event planners, media consultants and the like.

Regional Communications Units

The main activities of the regional communications services units are:

- to provide strategic advice and planning support;
- to develop and translate regional news releases, backgrounders, articles, speeches, etc.;
- media relations, including briefing the media on regional issues; and
- planning and support for ministerial visits/events in the region, including speech writing, logistical support, on-site media relations support, attendance at events and media events as the Minister's press secretary, tape recording of speeches and interviews, etc.

It is worth noting that, in most regions, the communications and executive services staff occupy offices in the same area close to the offices of the Regional Director General and Associate Director General. In many instances, communications staff are expected to assist from time to time in the performance of the executive services functions.

Business Lines

In general, the Communications Branch at headquarters provides the following range of activities, products and services. These are frequently undertaken and adapted in the regions, where communications staff also provide specific services and activities, often associated with ministerial visits or other regionally-specific activities, situations or events.

The Business Lines are as follows:

Services for the Minister

- Provision of services for the Minister, including communications advice, planning and implementation, speech writing and the coordination of ministerial trips (in conjunction with the Minister's Office and program staff in the regions).

Communications Advice, Planning and Implementation

- Strategic communications advice and planning on the communication of ministerial and departmental policies, programs and initiatives;
- Development of the annual *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan*;
- Public education, including the development of the departmental short- and long-term strategy and the implementation of initiatives (in cooperation with the regions);
- Media relations, including press releases, media lines, media briefings and press conferences;
- Incident management — monitoring, evaluating and assisting in the management of potential crisis situations;
- Event planning, coordination and implementation (in consultation with the Minister's Office, the regions and policy/program areas); and
- Communications advice on departmental *Access to Information Program (ATIP)* requests.

Coordination and Liaison

- Liaison with program and policy areas, and with regional staff;
- Development of partnerships with Aboriginal groups, e.g., Assembly of First Nations (*Gathering Strength* direction and commitment); and
- Coordination of federal communications on Aboriginal issues (horizontal files) through forums such as the Interdepartmental Communications Committee, Regional Councils, etc.

Research

- Public opinion research (qualitative and quantitative) coordination, including the preparation of the annual public opinion research plan; and
- Media and environmental (stakeholder) monitoring and analysis.

Production Advice, Planning and Services

- Departmental advertising coordination;
- Publishing, including the provision of advice to policy/program staff on design and layout, cost-effective printing methods, and government guidelines on no-frills publishing and alternate formats;
- Audio-visual services coordination, alternate format materials for disabled Canadians, and exhibit coordination;
- Editorial services in both official languages; and
- Production of the client newsletter, Transitions, in hard copy and on the Internet.

Internal (Corporate) Services

- Internal communications for the department, including planning and the production of *Intercom*, Deputy Minister and ministerial E-mails, and other corporate projects such as learning and leadership initiatives;
- Distribution; and
- Contract management and branch administrative support.

Section 4 - Principal Findings and Recommendations

The principal findings and recommendations outlined in this section constitute the core of the report. Both the findings and the recommendations have been distilled to provide a practical, manageable guide to the department as it proceeds with improvements to the management of its communications function. They are based on a large volume of information gathered from interviews, meetings, workshops and analyses of documentation, as well as the extensive professional experience of the review team.

Strategic Direction

Issue

Strategic direction tells an organization what it should be doing, how to do it and whether it is achieving what it set out to do. For the department, the issue is how to strengthen its capacity to provide strategic direction to its communications function. A key step in this direction is for the department to define and promulgate goals and priorities that can guide day-to-day communications activities effectively.

An effective strategic direction for the communications function would include the following elements and criteria. The goals should be formulated and promulgated under the direction of the senior management group and should be reviewed regularly by them. The goals should reflect the priorities and objectives of the government and the Minister; they should be designed to provide guidance on all aspects of the department's communication function; and they should be articulated in clear, simple language that resonates with people both inside and outside the department.

Findings, Observations and Analysis

Strengthening Strategic Direction

Interviews with staff in the Minister's Office, Privy Council Office, the department's senior management, and with other federal departments reflected high expectations for this communications review. In particular, the interviews reflected confidence that the department would find ways to give significantly stronger strategic direction to its communications function, and that it has most of the capacity to do so.

Most interviewees who spoke about the Strategic Communications Directorate said they thought it was doing a good job in difficult circumstances, but that its efforts did not have a strong impact on day-to-day communications activities. Some Communications Branch staff observed that, as

a practical matter, strategies were sometimes developed to address specific issues such as the impending creation of Nunavut, the public education strategy, planning around the Nisga'a situation, and the first media relations plan for the branch. Such specific strategies were generally considered to be effective, although they were not explicitly tied to the department's communications goals.

The most consistent message from senior managers inside and outside the department was that DIAND's communications function needs stronger strategic direction. This message was also communicated in fairly explicit terms by most persons interviewed and by workshop participants.

From both inside and outside the department stronger strategic direction meant several things. For example, it could mean:

- ensuring understanding and support for goals and priorities;
- spending less time in a "crisis management mode" and more time on established goals and priorities;
- applying resources only to activities for which goals have been clearly identified;
- devoting fewer resources to low pay-off activities, such as certain press releases, that have a tenuous link to communications goals, and more on agreed priorities; and
- devoting more effort to surveying/monitoring to see whether communications goals are being achieved.

Making Goals Authoritative

There is little evidence that the department has a regular process, directed by senior management and well understood by staff and partners for formulating and promulgating communications goals. In the absence of such a process, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to have strong strategic direction. Managing such a process tends to be time-consuming and challenging, but it is a prerequisite to strong strategic direction.

The regions have a particularly important role to play in the formulation of communications goals because of the diversity of issues and circumstances in each region. If goals are to be authoritative, the regions need to see their relevance to situations.

For example, the process for formulating, deciding and promulgating goals and priorities could follow a well-structured plan with lead times calculated to provide for the involvement of communications staff and policy and program staff, as well as partners (e.g., the Assembly of First Nations, as envisaged in the Agenda for Action signed with the department). The process would conclude with a senior management decision and a formal promulgation of the goals under the authority of the Deputy Minister.

Focussing on Priorities Rather than "Crisis Management"

Interviewees indicated that they felt that the Communications Branch and regional communications units have a tendency to respond, more or less indiscriminately, to the numerous requests for their services that they receive from many quarters. While there was a great deal of understanding and empathy for communications staff who face these demands on a daily basis, interviewees felt that a more effective, focussed and strategic driven service would better serve the long-term directions of the department.

When responding to numerous "crises," the branch consumes significant resources fighting fires and running to catch up, even though some of the fire-fighting and running may have little to do with previously agreed upon goals and objectives.

The review team's analysis of the situation is that the Communications Branch and regional communications units operate in a "crisis management mode" largely as a reflection of a lack of a clear strategic direction. Strategic direction — with its foundation of agreed, clearly articulated goals and priorities — would help to identify and anticipate issues for which a communications response is appropriate. It would help, for example, to discriminate between issues where the branch and/or regional communications units should take the lead and where policy or program groups should do so. It would also help in deciding where effort and resources should be focussed.

For example, it is interesting to consider how the communications aspects of land claims issues could be more effectively managed by the department if increased public understanding about these issues were defined as a proactive communications goal. In this situation, it would be easier to systematically apply the resources of the Communications Branch, regional communications units, as well as policy and program units to promote understanding of key issues and potential impacts of anticipated decisions (e.g., Delgamuukw). This could be done by laying some groundwork with partners, opinion leaders, politicians, and affected communities aimed at de-fusing some of the negative commentary that often accompanies announcements about land claims settlements. The alternative is to remain in a reactive mode and to deal with the communications fall-out of major claims decisions after they are announced.

The review team saw some evidence that the Nisga'a situation was being handled in a coherent way, but this was done outside the framework of agreed, overall communications goals. Such an approach can be effective, but only if it is used on an exceptional basis.

There is no doubt that the Communications Branch and regional units have much of the capacity needed to respond to actual crises (e.g., the communications aspects of sit-ins), and, more generally, to deal with the fast pace and diversity of communications issues. However, this is qualitatively and quantitatively different from operating in a "crisis management mode" most of the time. Operating constantly in such a mode is not sustainable over the long term.

This report addresses in other sections the investment that needs to be made in helping partners — especially Aboriginal groups — develop the capacity to take on a greater share of the department's current communications activities. The pay-off of such an investment includes the possibility of reduced day-to-day pressure on the communications function within the department.

Focussing Resources on Previously Agreed-Upon Goals and Priorities

Based on interviews and experience with other government departments, it was noted that there is a tendency in many departments, including DIAND, to ask communications staff to solve substantive policy and program related problems through "slick" communications. This is a difficult if not impossible task, and one that often wastes a great deal of communications resources. Being clear about communications goals and priorities can help in distinguishing between communications issues on the one hand and policy and program issues on the other.

Conversely, the lack of clear communications goals leaves communications staff with a shaky foundation from which to negotiate and discuss inappropriate demands for assistance with policy and program units. The tendency to call on communications staff to solve substantive problems can also be reduced by having clear procedures for collaborating — dividing the labour — with policy or program groups when high visibility issues arise.

The DIAND Communications Branch and regional communications units were no more immune to the tendency to have urgent issues subsume the important ones than other communications organizations. This universal problem, particularly acute in the normally fast-paced communications milieu, can be reduced by having clear goals and priorities to help in deciding how to allocate resources.

With a few notable exceptions, most persons interviewed who discussed workload and resource questions suggested that the number of press releases should be significantly reduced because studies of usage and pick-up by the media indicated that a majority generated a low communications pay-off. The message from participants — although not always couched in these terms — was "We don't see how many of these press releases relate to our goals." Clear communications goals can help provide a practical foundation to decide whether any proposed press release is worth the substantial effort often involved.

Making Goals Practical

Most managers and staff, including Communications Branch staff and regional communications staff, did not refer to specific communications goals or documents, except for *Gathering Strength*, which is a substantive policy document, not primarily a communications document. Many managers and staff said they were aware of documents such as the department's *1998-1999 Corporate Strategic Communications Plan*, but few, if any, indicated that they used the document to guide their day-to-day communications activities.

Regions do not, as a rule, use the *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan* as the foundation for their own plans, and, in a majority of regions, the review team saw little evidence that locally- or nationally-generated communications plans were used to guide day-to-day communications activities. Most regions did not often refer to "strategic direction" in discussing their communications activities and related issues.

As indicated above, a key reason for the foregoing situation is that the *1998-1999 Corporate Strategic Communications Plan*, developed by the Communications Branch, was not formulated, endorsed or promulgated through a regular process directed by senior management. This means that the plan, while providing much useful information, does not carry the authority needed to guide daily communications activities.

Other key reasons why the *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan* is not widely relied on to guide ongoing communications activities are that the goals it articulates are not sufficiently clear nor comprehensive enough to promote understanding in the department about their use and applicability.

This said, the plan's preamble, introduction, strategic considerations, communications approach and other key elements are well articulated and useful. In the final analysis, however, the plan does not provide enough focussed guidance to communications, policy and program staff to help them make a strong contribution to the communications function. Where staff do make a significant contribution, it is more likely to be because they have taken some time and effort to ensure that they understood and correctly interpreted the strategic direction that is identified in the plan.

The *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan* indicates that its foundations rest on *Gathering Strength*. The plan, however, has not been adequately tied to *Gathering Strength* both in terms of substance and process. The goals of the plan do not look as though they flow from *Gathering Strength*, even though they may be viewed as consistent with it. The positive and successful way that *Gathering Strength* has been used for communications purposes in most regions and at headquarters illustrates the importance of operationalizing goals systematically. Most staff interviewed throughout the department were familiar with *Gathering Strength*, and many reported that, in accordance with plans and directives developed in their units, they reinforced its objectives in the course of their dealings with clients and partners. In some regions, for example, workshops were organized with staff and sometimes also with partners to consider the implications of *Gathering Strength*.

There is no doubt that tying the *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan* to *Gathering Strength* could be a major asset. Senior management would need to consider in some detail how the four objectives of *Gathering Strength* should be operationalized for communications purposes. This would mean undertaking systematically — under senior management direction — such familiar activities associated with strategic communications planning as defining target audiences, key messages, activities, and timetables for implementation. The plan would be tied to a few clear,

resonant objectives* that carry unmistakably the full weight of the Minister's and government's authority. Another question is whether *Gathering Strength* can, indeed, serve as the foundation for a northern communications strategy, as the plan asserts. *Gathering Strength* does not address many of the challenges to effective communications related to the North has identified in Section 3, "Communications Environment".

Other standard activities, such as the description of the public environment and strategic considerations are well covered in the *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan.*

The public education strategy illustrates similar issues. Most staff interviewed were well aware of the priority attached to public education, but most were unclear about the scope, goals and operational plans. As noted above, the *Corporate Strategic Communications Plan* implies that the department's main goal in relation to public education is to educate the public about the poor socio-economic conditions in Aboriginal communities.

Monitoring Progress Toward Goals

A number of communications, policy and program staff at headquarters and the regions indicated that more effort should be devoted to assessing whether communications goals were being met, and that this would be a relatively high pay-off communications activity for the department. The review team saw little evidence that opinion surveys, monitoring and similar activities were used to assess whether established goals were being achieved.

In addition, little, if any, evidence that the performance of policy and program staff was appraised in light of their contribution to the department's communications function was found. The capacity of staff to communicate effectively with their superiors, peers and subordinates seemed to be considered in their overall performance, but not their contribution to the department's communications goals. A good part of the explanation — as suggested above — is that, at present, such goals lack the authority, clarity and comprehensiveness needed to serve as guides to day-to-day communications activities.

Monitoring progress toward goals would require not only solid evidence about whether they are being met, but also why. Regular assessments of the contribution of staff to the department's communications function could provide part of the answer.

Actively Influencing the Government's Communications Goals

Indications from interviews with senior managers in the Privy Council Office (PCO), the department and the Minister's Office, is that PCO's role in influencing communications goals is primarily one way, through which DIAND gets direction. It is rarely an exchange where the

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* (1) Renewing the Partnerships; (2) Strengthening Aboriginal Governance; (3) Developing a New Fiscal Relationship; and (4) Supporting Strong Communities, People and Economies.

department also takes the initiative to influence the government's communications goals for Aboriginal affairs. The department, with its great pool of knowledge and experience in Aboriginal affairs, is well placed to influence the government's communication goals in this area.

Strengthening Interdepartmental Coordination Mechanisms

Most senior managers within DIAND and in other federal departments indicated that the interdepartmental mechanisms for formulating and implementing communications policies for Aboriginal affairs are weak. In general, the level of representation on the key Directors General coordinating committee is well below that of Director General. Moreover, the challenge persists for DIAND to coordinate communications about *Aboriginal* affairs, as distinct from issues concerning First Nations and Inuit, its statutory responsibility. This challenge seems particularly acute in most regions where, as a practical matter, regional management considers the department's mandate to extend no further than to First Nations and Inuit affairs. This makes it very difficult for regional staff to play a leadership role among federal departments on the Aboriginal affairs file.

Senior Managers in DIAND often mentioned the role that the Communications Branch plays in coordinating the government's communications on Aboriginal issues and were especially appreciative of the efforts around *Gathering Strength*. It should also be noted that some representatives of other federal departments expressed the view that the interdepartmental coordinating committee on Aboriginal issues was not as effective as it could be.

As indicated earlier, the department's mandate for northern issues also involves many other federal departments. Some sort of interdepartmental mechanisms to coordinate communications with respect to the federal role in Canada's North is highly desirable given the importance of projecting stable and consistent messages during a period of significant change.

The review team does not underestimate the challenges associated with interdepartmental coordination, particularly in such a complex policy area as Aboriginal affairs. This said, there is much to gain — for the department and the government — by having a coordinated federal communications goals on Aboriginal affairs. Among the benefits for the department is the potential of having other departments carry messages that support its policy and communications objectives. By the same token, there is much to lose by having to carry most of the weight of the government's communications goals for Aboriginal affairs and northern development alone and/or being in conflict with other federal departments.

Conclusions

The lack of authoritative, comprehensive, clear goals — the foundation of strategic direction — is at the root of the majority of challenges to an effective communications function within the department.

Since strengthening strategic direction in communications is a collective responsibility of senior management — not just that of the Communications Branch — Senior Management should take the lead on this issue. Processes for formulating the department's communications goals should provide for broad involvement of communications staff, policy and program staff, as well as partners and clients. The processes should also support the systematic operationalization of the goals.

The authority commanded by *Gathering Strength* may help in formulating an effective set of communications goals for 1999-2000 and beyond. Such goals should visibly embrace the objectives of *Gathering Strength* as well as other objectives such as those relating to northern affairs. In this way, the department could have an effective set of communications objectives to guide all aspects of its communications function.

Recommendations

1. The Director General of Communications should establish regular processes — conducted at least once a year, under the direction of senior management — for:

   a) ascertaining and influencing the government's communications objectives and priorities (e.g., through a combination of strengthened interdepartmental mechanisms and by proposing communications goals and strategies to PCO/PMO).

   b) involving communications, policy and program staff at headquarters (including the Minister's Office) and regions, in the formulation of DIAND's communications goals in the light of overall departmental goals and priorities and the government's overall communications goals and priorities.

   c) involving partners and clients in the formulation of communications goals.

   d) approving, promulgating and operationalizing the department's communications goals and priorities.

   e) assessing achievement of agreed goals and priorities, in consultation with partners, in light of agreed criteria.

   f) providing the basis for assessing annually the contribution of staff involved with the communications function to the achievement of the department's communications goals.

Mandate and Business Lines

Issue

Responsibility for carrying out the communications function is a shared one according to Treasury Board policy. The mandates of the Communications Branch and the regional units are more narrowly defined in terms of a specific set of roles and responsibilities for which they are ultimately accountable.

In order to be effective, the mandate of the Communications Branch and regional units must be clearly articulated, and the roles of the departmental communications staff in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of communications activities must be clearly understood and delineated.

Since business lines are the logical extensions of the communications mandate, they should reflect and respond to the full range of communication demands of a modern public service and the needs and expectations of the department's clients, audiences and partners. Business lines should also be coherently linked to the communications goals and priorities of the department. Of additional benefit to the overall planning and delivery of cohesive communications would be a program activity structure that facilitates effective, efficient delivery of complementary communications activities and services.

Findings, Observations and Analysis

Mandates and Business Lines

The Communications Branch has a mandate to inform client groups of the department's policies, programs, services and activities; to develop strategies, to provide advice on the communication of ministerial and departmental policies, programs and initiatives; and to provide communications services. It is also responsible for developing and implementing corporate priorities related to public education and incident management.

As outlined in the *Communications Products, Practices and Procedures* manual, within the Communications Branch, the Communications Services Management Directorate and the Strategic Communications, Planning and Public Affairs Directorate — have both articulated mandates for their services and activities.

- The mandate of the Communications Services Management Directorate is the "provision of quality, professional, technical support to ensure the most effective implementation of the corporate communications program."

- The mandate of the Strategic Communications, Planning and Public Affairs Directorate is "to provide proactive, strategic, quality support in the planning, development and implementation of all departmental communications activities."

Regional communications units have mandates that generally parallel that of the Communications Branch at headquarters. However, communications staff in some regions have the added responsibilities of work that is performed for the executive services function in the department.

Based on interviews, the mandate of the Communications Branch and regional units appears to be reasonably well understood. Senior managers at headquarters and ministerial staff considered the strategic aspect of the communications mandate to be extremely important. They also appreciated the value of media monitoring and public opinion research. They were aware of the communications role in developing the incident management guidelines, which they found useful. Some regions have modified the guidelines for their own use. However, a couple of managers questioned the appropriateness of having responsibility for incident management function as part of the communications mandate.

It should be noted that the responsibility for the departmental Web page on the Internet is not included as part of the Communication Branch's mandate. Similarly, conducting consultations regarding new policy or program initiatives is not part of that mandate.

Among communications personnel, there appeared to be is some uncertainty as to how far the department's mandate extends in communicating the government's broader objectives with respect to Métis, non-status and off-reserve Indians south of 60. This needs to be clarified, especially for those on the front lines in the regions. If their mandate extends beyond communicating the department's policies, programs services and activities, they will need to be kept abreast of the big picture as it evolves.

The detailed business lines for the Communications Branch and regional units, described in the Section 3 are generally clear, comprehensive and logical.

Strengthening the Profile of the Branch

Concerns were expressed about the visibility and profile of communications within the department. Many respondents thought that program managers underestimated the importance and value of the services provided by the Communications Branch and regional units. There was also some concern that communications personnel did not have enough regular and sustained access to senior management. The problem of visibility and "clout" is particularly acute in those regions where the communications manager does not sit on the management committee in that region.

Tracking Emerging Issues

The locus of responsibility for tracking emerging issues within Communications Branch and regional units is not clear. It is understood to be a shared responsibility, but the review team noted a lot of confusion about mechanisms for communicating these issues to senior managers at headquarters. (Through the Regional Director General and program managers or through communications?). It was also observed that the line between the information-gathering aspect of the communications mandate and more formal consultation exercises is not clearly defined. Many stakeholders do not differentiate between these activities and several offered general comments on the adequacy of departmental consultations.

Managers and ministerial staff were generally satisfied with the tracking of emerging issues and reported few surprises. Several expressed the view that the department should be more proactive and should focus more on activities such as providing background briefings to media and stakeholders. It was felt that this could reduce the amount of effort spent reacting to issues generated by either lack of information or misinformation.

Communications Products

The provision of services by the Communications Services Management Directorate was recognized as an area of strength. The Directorate received high praise from all quarters for the quality and timeliness of their products (with some exceptions, including speeches which require fast turn-around times, often with little advance notice). At the same time, several people remarked on the apparent lack of direct links to broader strategic objectives.

Nevertheless, most of the program managers felt that there was too much time spent on producing information products, at the expense of providing strategic advice and planning. The generation of large numbers of press releases was frequently mentioned as an activity that should receive much less attention. As indicated earlier, the majority of respondents doubted the effectiveness of press releases, despite their generally high quality. They were unsure of who the "target" was; they did not think they were read, nor did they see how they advanced the department's overall communications objectives.

The number and effectiveness of press releases was also a concern expressed by representatives of the Aboriginal community and certain media. Many people interviewed, particularly in the North, commented on the need to provide information in other than written formats. Several stakeholders mentioned that radio and television should be utilized more since these are well established as the primary mode of communication in the North. They also indicated that more information should be provided in Aboriginal languages (not necessarily in written form).

Communications personnel reported that information was not usually made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities or low literacy levels. Many recognized, however, that this was an issue of emerging importance.

Public Education

Public education was generally seen as a high priority and an appropriate new element in the communications mandate. This business line enjoys considerable interest and support amongst all stakeholders and appears to the review team to warrant a significant investment of effort and resources to meet heavy needs/demands. Although the branch is making efforts to give it more profile and the importance of the public education business line is widely accepted, there is no clarity about what this entails and where the emphasis should be placed.

The public education will need to be more aggressively marketed to ensure that all programs in headquarters and the regions, as well as other departments dealing with Aboriginal and northern issues, are aware of its importance, and become involved in a timely fashion in planning and delivering communications activities on relevant policy and program initiatives.

There are many "publics" with different concerns depending on where they are located. It was generally conceded that the non-Aboriginal public should be given more information about the history, culture, aspirations and socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal peoples. At the same time, many people (managers, communications personnel, media, Aboriginal representatives and other stakeholders) commented on the need to explain what the department is doing and why — to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences. This is especially true in the North where Aboriginal peoples make up a large proportion of the population and the department's responsibilities encompass broader scientific and economic development issues.

Some managers and staff commented that public education efforts may also play a useful role in sensitizing officials in other federal departments about the breadth and complexity of the department's responsibilities with respect to First Nations, Inuit and northerners.

Communications is a shared responsibility

Senior managers were conscious of the fact that they were also responsible for effective communications. Several senior managers reported that they involved communications staff in the development of new policies and programs. For example, in the NWT Region, the communications unit plays an integral part in the ongoing operations and has a key role on the leadership initiative. However, this is not a consistent pattern. Managers need to make more effort to ensure that communications staff have an opportunity to provide strategic advice early on in the process. Too often communications issues are an after-thought. Communications staff reported that they were often required to prepare communications products on an urgent and ad hoc basis which undermines their effectiveness. The work load and stress on communications staff could be alleviated if managers were more conscientious about their own responsibilities with respect to communicating with their colleagues, both internally and externally.

Departmental officials, other departments, the Aboriginal community and the media generally concur that the Minister is, and can be, a particularly effective communications "tool," and has played a valuable role in some key initiatives. However, the Minister's staff complain that the Minister's speeches are poor, lack substance and often need to be rewritten.

Conclusions

Feedback from internal and external clients throughout headquarters, the National Capital Region and in all regions shows that there is a clearly-articulated demand and strong support for the current range of business lines, although the relative importance of these needs vary from group to group and issue to issue.

It is evident to the review team that the department has moved proactively to deploy resources and create mechanisms to help ensure a reasonably well-balanced capacity to deliver the full suite of communications services.

The key concern is the relative emphasis that is appropriate for each business line — in particular the relative emphasis to be paid to "communications support services" versus "strategic communications advice." Senior departmental managers, especially at headquarters (but also in the regions), the Minister's Office, central agencies and other federal departments consistently demand greater emphasis on the "strategic" side, but paradoxically they do not consistently and in a timely fashion invite/allow communications personnel to play such a strategic role in policy and program matters. At the same time they continue to demand many "operational" type support activities from communications personnel, such as communications products.

There will be a continuing need for the full range of business line activities offered. None can be completely abandoned without a serious gap in communications activities and service. However, there can and should be a relative shift in emphasis to those communications business lines that take most advantage of the communications function's specialized skills, sensitivities and capabilities. These include strategic analysis of communications issues and environments; the shaping of clear and consistent messages for different audiences; clear, effective writing and the development of communications materials that are effectively targeted and designed.

It is clear that the development and implementation of an effective public education strategy will have to take into account the wide diversity in circumstances across the country. Its success will depend on extensive input and close collaboration with Aboriginal partners, northern stakeholders and regional communications units. It will also require an ongoing investment in public opinion research to aid in planning and monitoring progress.

Recommendations

2. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with senior management and the Minister's Office, should establish priorities among business lines clearly linked to departmental communications goals.

3. The Director General of Communications should revisit the branch mandate with respect to contract management, the Web site and incident management to determine if these are appropriate business lines for the branch or should be handled elsewhere.

4. The Director General of Communications, in consultation/collaboration with programs at headquarters and the regions, and with Aboriginal and northern partners, should develop a clear vision for the public education function, with goals, planning and evaluation processes, resourcing priorities/criteria, and related delivery and coordination mechanisms.

Working Relationship

Issue

In order to carry out their mandates, departmental communications personnel must establish and maintain effective working relationships with internal clients and colleagues and external clients, partners, stakeholders and the media. These relationships require a clear understanding of the expectations, needs and priorities of their clients. They also require a similar understanding of the responsibilities and roles of all those involved in communications planning, design, delivery and evaluation, to ensure optimal collaboration, complementarity and consistency, and to make the best use of limited resources.

Communications personnel must also have a solid understanding and appreciation of the values, experiences and situation of different partners and other stakeholders in different regions, settings and circumstances, and a commitment to addressing these sensitively and meaningfully in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of communications activities. Close, cooperative relationships with partners and stakeholders require openness and mutual respect, and a sharing of skills, insights, experiences, sensitivities and resources for the achievement of mutual communications objectives.

Findings, Observations and Analysis

Relationships with Clients and Colleagues within DIAND

The Minister's Office and Senior Management

It is clear that the Minister is generally regarded as the primary client for communications purposes. Minister's Office staff reported that they were generally satisfied with the service they are getting, with the notable exception of speeches which, as previously noted, they feel often lack substance and need to be rewritten. They do not, however, seem too familiar with how the Communications Branch is organized, nor are they sure who is responsible for what at headquarters. Interestingly, some senior managers indicated that they thought that messages from the Minister's Office were not always clearly communicated to Communications Branch staff.

Many regional communications staff are healthily self-critical of their limited understanding and appreciation of the demand of "the centre" and of the pressures faced daily by the Minister and Senior Officials. Regional communications staff also generally admit that they lack a full understanding and appreciation of the realities that their communications counterparts at headquarters face.

The relationships between the Minister's Office and regional communications personnel were reported to be very close and generally productive.

Colleagues in Policy and Programs

Although the communications function is recognized as a "shared responsibility," the communications duties of policy and program staff are not well articulated in planning documents, nor are the obligations for engagement of communications personnel clearly set out in the policy/program process. This makes effective partnerships within DIAND difficult and ad hoc.

The frequency and degree to which communications personnel at headquarters and in the regions have established good rapport and effective working relationships with other DIAND units is highly variable, reflecting different understandings on the part of policy and program units about the value-added that communications personnel can bring to bear on policy and program initiatives, and probably different "chemistries" on a personal level between communications and policy/program personnel.

Communications personnel at both headquarters and in the regions said that they often have to pick up the slack for poor communications between managers and other departments on substantive issues, and that too much is expected from communications personnel — typically at the eleventh hour — to "save the day" on problematic or poorly articulated policy and program initiatives. Several senior program managers at headquarters concurred with this observation.

There is a tendency for some programs to relegate the Communications Branch's role in headquarters to relatively mundane — and frequently last-minute — crunching out of basic information pieces such as press releases and fact sheets, rather than more critical things such as analysis of public environments, identification and development of core messages, development of strategies for public and stakeholder engagement, anticipation and prevention of communications and public relations "incidents," and the like.

At headquarters, the Communications Branch's working relationships with various programs/branches are highly uneven. In some cases, communications managers and staff enjoy a close working relationship that draws out the best that communications has to offer. In those cases, communications staff are brought into new files at an early stage and play an active role in shaping communications programs and messages. In other cases, however, there does not seem to be a good understanding of the importance of communications in the overall policy and program context, nor of the contribution that communications personnel can make to the development and implementation of program initiatives.

The situation is similar in most regions, though daily interaction between communications and program staff seems to be better than that at headquarters. However, given the fact that communications programs and messages for national initiatives are developed at headquarters, the regions also suffer from the inconsistent partnerships between communications and program staff at headquarters.

A common problem across the department — even where communications/program relations are good — is that the communications function is typically seen in too narrow a way by program managers and staff. The general tendency is to look to communications staff to "deliver messages" or "put spins on things." Program staff look primarily for support in the form of drafting press releases, organizing media announcements and other events, and editing and producing information materials. These are all valuable functions as far as they go, but do not fully tap what communications staff has to offer.

Typically missing, are requests from programs for strategic advice and support that communications personnel are willing, keen and able to give to program managers to help them plan, design, launch and eventually evaluate their initiatives.

Communications managers and staff are largely frustrated by this under-appreciation of their offerings on the part of program staff. They feel they have a lot to contribute in the form of assessments of the public environment (how issues are perceived and how initiatives might play out in various public quarters), identification of prime audiences and their different information needs and appropriate messaging, advice on the shaping of policies and programs to make them more understandable and/or acceptable to various constituencies, and monitoring of media and public reaction to assist in tracking and adapting policies and programs as they are implemented.

In regions in the North, the situation is somewhat unique. DIAND personnel "live in a goldfish bowl." They meet their clients everyday and are frequently called upon to account for what the department is doing. Because DIAND is the main federal presence in the North, they are also asked to explain what activities other federal departments are doing. The northern communications units were very conscious of program staff as clients. Program staff, in turn, were very aware of the importance of involving communications units in their work. The program people interviewed said they greatly appreciated the support they were getting from communications staff. Working relationships between communications and program staff were reported to be very cooperative and effective.

Headquarters and the Regions

While headquarters and regional staff said that they often felt misunderstood or under-appreciated by their colleagues, they also consistently welcome any measures that will improve their knowledge and sensitivity so as to improve their service to clients.

There is also a general consensus among headquarters and regional communications personnel that the overall openness and quality of their own working relationships — traditionally strained and confrontational — is steadily improving, largely as a result of recent efforts to establish regular contact through teleconferences and joint planning/review sessions.

As noted above, communications personnel at headquarters and in the regions seem to have a pragmatic appreciation of their own relative shortcomings and limitations, i.e., a generally poor understanding of local conditions and circumstances on the part of headquarters and a similar poor understanding of the realities of "Ottawa" politics and the policy process. Each group seems to be keen to learn more from the other, and both sides are committed to more active listening, with respect for the insights and experience of the other.

Regions feel that they still spend too much time and effort "feeding mechanisms in headquarters"; they feel pulled in too many directions on too many issues. They generally agree that they need to work out a more agreeable working relationship with headquarters, with healthy processes that allow meaningful discussion and negotiation of priorities and approaches that avoid the current pattern of the perceived "dumping of projects" onto regional laps.

Regions also generally feel that there is a shortage of good information available from headquarters on key issues and topics such as policy initiatives and processes, legislation, self-government, land and treaty agreements, etc. In particular, they feel that the analysis sections in Memoranda to Cabinet do not fully reflect regional perspectives.

Regions feel that they are most often an afterthought when it comes to planning and developing communications strategies and programs. Several headquarters communications managers agree with this complaint, and advocate a more timely and proactive outreach to regions on communications issues and initiatives.

Some regions feel that headquarters could provide more support to the regions, where most of the day-to-day interaction with Aboriginal peoples and northerners takes place.

Interestingly, headquarters communications managers and staff were not generally as critical of their relationships with their regional counterparts, although they were troubled by what they believed to be an inconsistent level of commitment among some regions to national communications objectives and activities.

Relationships with External Clients, Partners, Stakeholders and the Media

Partnership in the Context of Communications

At one level, the term "partnership" is really short-hand for good, honest and effective relationships with others. In that sense, there appears to be a genuine commitment on the part of departmental communications personnel to pursue and sustain relationships with other key players based on these characteristics and qualities.

"Partnership" also has a more substantive and tangible meaning within the communications context — indeed, within the broader policy and program development process of the department as a whole. It means, among other things, engaging and working with others — in the department, with other federal agencies, provincial and territorial counterparts, Aboriginal organizations and communities, media (both mainstream and Aboriginal) and other stakeholders — to share information and sustain meaningful dialogue on matters of mutual concern and interest. It means collaborating with others, and sharing information, resources and "power," to find or develop and utilize the most appropriate and effective means to support shared communications objectives. And it means equipping others, where appropriate, with the necessary tools and support to play their role in the communications effort, rather than doing it by government alone.

The goal in fostering and sustaining such partnerships — as made clear by the many and diverse communications managers and staff across Canada who support this — is to take best advantage of the available networks, knowledge and skills, wherever they be situated, so that communications are meaningful, timely and effective. It also helps to sharpen mutual appreciation of different contexts, circumstances and needs from one group or region to another, and to support the overall policy and program processes. Indeed, it applies to the policy and program process itself, as part of an overall *modus operandi* for the department.

While the concept of partnerships in the communications field is relatively novel, there are already some "good practices." Examples could range from preparation of materials for distribution through outside distribution vehicles to active collaboration on communications activities and programs and strategies.

One major challenge, as a regional communications manager put it, is that partnership building is not a routine activity yet. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is rarely direct contact from Aboriginal organizations to communications personnel; program staff typically have the most direct contact. This means that communications staff — at headquarters and in the regions — do not have as much opportunity to establish a rapport with the Aboriginal community. This is especially true where program managers and staff themselves do not enjoy, or have not established, a close rapport and continuous working relationship with the communications personnel.

Several DIAND senior managers, ministerial staff and even headquarters and regional communications managers and staff themselves emphasized that formal communications with First Nations and Inuit partners need to be established. Regional communications staff, in particular, need to become more aware of key contacts in their community. To do so, they need to have officers in the field on a day-to-day basis. DIAND also needs to work to better understand how First Nations and Inuit organizations work. In the eyes of Aboriginal partners, proper protocols of the Aboriginal community are often not recognized, and there remains a lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture that stands in the way of effective partnership.

Several communications managers, Aboriginal representatives and northern stakeholders noted that it is sometimes not possible or even appropriate for departmental communications staff to conduct joint activities with the Aboriginal community. On certain issues, there are radically different perspectives and messages that call for separate tracks.

There is a need — widespread across Canada, both at headquarters and in the regions — to mend some fences with different groups, and to provide an outreach to them as clients and partners. Most Aboriginal groups and many in the media do not feel as if they are clients of the department when it comes to communications, even though they have strong information needs, and even play an active role in getting messages out and relaying input back to the department.

Other Government Departments

Other departments and levels of government are important external clients, yet linkages are generally poor. The interdepartmental committee process is not considered effective by the participants interviewed; this is part of a larger government-wide problem, generally recognized by other departments as well.

The review team heard some mixed messages on the nature of the department's relationships with central agencies, most notably the Privy Council Office, and to a lesser extent the Office of the Federal Interlocutor. On the one hand, their involvement in planning and shaping communications strategies is welcome by DIAND communications staff, because it provides both a profile and a focus, but on the other there is a fear that the needs and views of the centre are at odds with the department's own sense of needs and priorities, especially as they play out in the regions.

Communications managers and staff within DIAND and in other key federal departments and agencies agree on the need to improve the planning and coordination of communications activities relevant to the Aboriginal file. The northern file enjoys rather less profile, although when pressed communications managers were ready to admit a similar need related to the North.

There is a general sense that the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee is a noble effort to address a worthy problem, but has so far proven to be relatively ineffective. One of the problems is the tendency for departments (including DIAND) to send junior replacements, rendering the forum more of a clearinghouse of information than a strategic body.

As noted under the mandate discussion above, there is a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities within the federal community on files affecting Aboriginal people in general, and on the North in particular. The public education business line will place increasing focus — and pressure — on the department to identify the general public and mainstream interest groups as major clients and audiences.

Managers mentioned recent successes with interdepartmental approaches to strategic communications on a few horizontal files. *Gathering Strength*, for example, and the communications plan on persistent organic pollutants affecting the health of northern Inuit were most often mentioned. These successes need to be replicated on other initiatives.

Aboriginal peoples and northern stakeholders

At the national level, the branch has moved to work out effective relationships with Assembly of First Nations and the Inuit Tapirisat, but progress is slow and the way forward is not clear.

Based on interviews, the review team observed that communications staff — at headquarters and in the regions — are clearly committed to adapting to the needs of different audiences and partners, in particular those of Aboriginal people and their communities and institutions.

Communications staff are consistently aware of the importance of responding to the needs of their various clients. However, they are conscious of their own limitations with respect to knowledge, experience and sensitivities regarding the needs, conditions and circumstances of their external clients.

There is a significant difference in perceptions about the effectiveness of communications relationships with Aboriginal organizations. While communications staff at headquarters and in the regions feel that they enjoy a reasonably good relationship, the Aboriginal representatives quite consistently stated that they did not feel like partners in the process. Representatives of most of the Aboriginal organizations interviewed, particularly those in the National Capital Region, feel that departmental communications personnel are good on "spin" and glossy products but not on two-way communication. Many feel that they give more information to the department than they get. They also state that they are typically not consulted on communications materials and initiatives until the last minute.

It is important to note that this general view was not evident in the North — in the Yukon, in the and especially in Nunavut where, by all accounts, there are particularly close, cooperative and effective working relationships.

Aboriginal partners across Canada reported that they would like to see more collaboration, especially on public education initiatives because of the importance of building a strong, credible and sensitive understanding of the issues, conditions and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, on the part of the broader Canadian public.

Several Aboriginal organizations said they would like help in building their own internal capacity (this view was also expressed by a senior manager). One way to do this would be to contract more work out to communications groups that exist in Aboriginal organizations.

A number of stakeholders stated that they wanted greater access to more technical material on relevant economic, housing, environmental and other policy issues affecting Aboriginal and northern populations.

There is a general feeling that regional staff are more sensitive than those in headquarters to Aboriginal stakeholders, a sentiment shared even by many in headquarters. Communications managers and staff in headquarters conceded that many of them lack a full knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and northern conditions. This undermines their efforts to plan meaningful communications activities that will resonate with local needs and realities.

When Aboriginal organizations want information, they said that they typically call the Minister's Office or program staff. They frequently do not have ongoing contact with communications personnel, either at headquarters or in the regions. In fact, they often do not even know who the communications people are. Aboriginal organizations said that they would welcome an opportunity to develop a better relationship with communications staff. They recognize that there will be issues on which their interests may conflict with those of the department. Not everything has to be "joint"; it will be important to acknowledge each party's autonomy. A communications protocol could clarify areas in which joint efforts would be appropriate. Those mutual areas would most likely be on relatively neutral issues such as public education, and announcements related to funding agreements and joint program ventures.

Several Aboriginal stakeholders commented that they have not been able to obtain assistance from the communications personnel to develop their own communications strategies, which otherwise might take some of the workload off the regional communications functions and/or improve the reach and impact of local communications efforts.

While communications staff are largely respected as generally competent, hard working and dedicated, in the eyes of Aboriginal people, they are also seen to be impeded by the environment in which they work.

There are generally good relations between communications staff and the community in the North, with an increasing use of joint news releases and special events with Aboriginal organizations. In British Columbia there are innovative activities including the quarterly meeting of the First Nations Summit with the regional communications unit to discuss communications and public information.

In the Yukon, there is a systematic approach to collaboration under the *Umbrella Final Agreement* (UFA), with coordination of communications activities, development of joint messages, sharing of advance drafts, and efforts to avoid duplication of services. This is facilitated by regular face-to-face meetings every two weeks, with the Yukon government involved as well.

Several Aboriginal representatives remarked on potential obstacles to effective partnerships. They complained that DIAND is always trying to pre-package messages on key initiatives, yet the right "spin" for DIAND is not always the right spin for First Nations, and it is sometimes offensive to Aboriginal people. They also noted that First Nations and Inuit political and decision-making structures are relatively flat compared to the government, and that makes for a hard fit, especially in trying to negotiate and craft a joint communications product under tight deadlines.

The Media

Several media representatives, particularly the Aboriginal media, suggested that regular briefing meetings with DIAND officials, better access to senior officials and a greater openness in day-to-day dealings would go a long way toward both improving relationships between DIAND and the media and toward improving the department's image portrayed in the media.

As noted above, the media generally regard DIAND communications staff as basically competent and earnest, but recognize that they are constrained by departmental rules. While the media expect open, candid and direct contact with staff, and timely answers to their questions, they encounter communications staff who seem tentative, defensive and bureaucratic. Even the simplest of media questions seem to call for a double-checking and approvals up the line before answers are given. The media complained that they do not have access to relevant spokespersons. The media also resent the practice of communications staff asking for questions in advance before arranging a media interview with a departmental contact.

DIAND and other federal communications managers agree that good media relations are the most critical bottom line. The media said were very appreciative of background briefings and reported that they would like to receive them more frequently.

In Ontario, communications staff are trying to be more accessible to the media and to cooperate in getting good news stories printed in newspapers. For example, they recently arranged a series of articles in the *Globe and Mail*, and a story on Six Nations in the *Toronto Star*. In the Yukon, interaction with local media is considered to be done well. The region has brought in people with knowledge of the local media/situation, and who know the Yukon context. In British Columbia, media relations staff are increasingly proactive. The Regional Director General often has interviews with the media prior to press releases, and emphasizes good rapport. This provides the media with good access to contacts within the region.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize and reinforce the department's efforts to reach out to its partners and audiences, to build on existing momentum, and to continue to learn about their needs, concerns and priorities.

Many of the challenges of communications planning and delivery are affected by broader complexities in overall departmental and government relations, often making it difficult for communications personnel to break the ice and establish consistently healthy relationships with those outside the department. The specific commitments and expectations vis-à-vis each distinct "client" or "partner," are not well mapped out. This places communications staff in a difficult situation, not always knowing how to juggle priorities or fulfill commitments.

Some of the challenges facing communications personnel in establishing and maintaining effective relationships with their partners and others are beyond their capacity to control; even the eleventh hour involvement in communications activities is frequently the result of last-minute engagement of the communications people themselves by their policy and program counterparts.

In addition, the communications working environment is often coloured by substantive disagreement with clients on broader policy issues. At the same time, it is also clear from our discussions with Aboriginal and other stakeholders and our own observations, that many of the barriers and challenges that stand in the way of effective relationships are squarely within the control of communications personnel themselves.

A systematic mapping out of roles, responsibilities and service commitments, may help make better use of limited communications resources and minimize conflicts, uncertainties in delivery and coordination, while at the same time better promoting the value-added (and positive track record) of departmental communications so as to encourage greater, and more timely engagement of communications personnel in policy and program initiatives.

Recommendations

5. The Director General of Communications should develop a strategy and supporting information materials to actively communicate the roles and services of the communications function to departmental, Aboriginal, northern and other partners and stakeholders, emphasizing the full range of services, the importance of timely and effective collaboration in communications planning, and basic protocols and procedures to support effective partnerships. These materials should be supported with clear, factual examples of positive results/success stories, and articulation of the key ingredients for successful partnerships in communications planning and design.

6. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the regions, should increase the number of opportunities for face-to-face interaction between headquarters and regional staff to share experience and expertise.

7. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the programs at headquarters and the regions, should clarify the roles and responsibilities of headquarters, regional communications and program staff with respect to carrying out the communications function within DIAND.

8. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the programs at headquarters and the regions, and with Aboriginal partners, should clarify relationships with Aboriginal organizations and stakeholders particularly with respect of what is meant by "partnership" as it relates to the communications mandate. This would include a common understanding of areas of collaboration and areas of independence.

Staff Skills, Tools and Capacities

Issue

The issue is how to ensure that departmental communications staff are equipped with the knowledge, expertise and support required to do their job. The specific skills, tools and capacities required by staff are, of course, a function of such factors as the department's communications objectives and priorities, the mandates of the Communications Branch and regional communications units, government policies (e.g., contracting out services), and the role and capacity of partners. All of these factors evolve over time, and some, such as the role of partners in communications, have been evolving rapidly, particularly in the light of the new relationships with Aboriginal peoples proposed in *Gathering Strength*.

The approach to reviewing the adequacy of staff skills, tools and capacities relied primarily on what communications staff themselves told the review team in interviews and workshops. It was also based on the opinions of other departmental staff about these issues and the opinions of persons outside the department, including other federal officials, partners and representatives of the media.

Evidence the review team looked for included whether the Communications Branch and regional communications units possessed the range of professional skills, experience and sensitivities to do their current jobs, and whether people with such qualities were available through contracting, term assignments and the like. It also looked for evidence of programs and processes for continuous skill and knowledge development, as well as for expanding professional experience related to the communications function and its management. Finally, it looked for evidence of a positive environment that encourages and supports excellence and teamwork.

Findings, Observations and Analysis

A strong professional foundation

Departmental communication staff are generally regarded as competent, dedicated and committed to serving clients well. That is what the great majority of interviewees (other than departmental communication staff themselves) said about communications staff. And most retained this complimentary opinion even when they were critical of the quality of departmental products, services or procedures. For example, the quality of speeches was criticized by some interviewees inside and outside the department, but instead of criticizing communications staff, interviewees suggested hiring more speech writers with high level skills.

Most communications staff in the Communications Branch conveyed the impression that they were professional, dedicated and had the capacity to do their jobs effectively. Some Communications Branch staff did comment, however, that work pressures made professional upgrading and career development difficult to organize.

Communications staff did not report the existence of many formal, coherent strategies or programs to strengthen professional qualifications.

Strengthening Regional Communications Capacity

In several regions communications staff said they thought that they needed higher professional qualifications and greater experience than they possessed. In some instances, administrative or program staff had been assigned to communications jobs even though they had no formal communications background and little related experience. However, regional communications staff are committed to doing a good job.

As one would expect, in regions where communications staff were not perceived, *overall*, as having strong professional qualifications, their role tended to be focused on production of written material and organization of events, such as ministerial visits. They tended not to have a strong role at senior management tables and had little impact on the management of overall management of the communications function.

Strengthening regional communications capacity, in this case, could be best pursued through such traditional approaches as training, hiring and increasing the number of professional communications staff.

Regional staff need to be able to communicate effectively in ways and through media that suit the diverse preferences of their key audiences. For example, in many parts of the territories, broadcasting and personal communication are generally far better ways to communicate information than written material. Most communications staff in the North therefore need to be good verbal communicators, but need not be as expert in written communication as say, in southern urban areas. There is little point, therefore, in appointing staff with excellent writing skills to most communications positions in the territories unless they are also excellent verbal communicators. And their performance as verbal communicators should count for significantly more in their appraisals than their writing skills.

Consideration could also be given to making a point of identifying carefully, the requirements of communications positions in the regions that are particular to the evolving situation there.

Increasing Electronic Communications Capacity

Overall, the recent investments in new hardware in the Communications Branch have helped to ameliorate historical inadequacies, but staff still report that software and technical support are generally lagging. Most Communications Branch managers and staff report that they have yet to

fully develop their systems and processes to make the most out of new computer and telecommunications equipment. They also note the need to further streamline production processes for communications materials, to improve overall efficiency and quality control.

In several regions staff report that their Aboriginal partners' computer/communications equipment is sufficiently far in advance of regional equipment as to impede efficient communications.

It was recognized that increasing telecommunications capacity requires resources that are always scarce and that strong technical support is essential. Strategic investment in telecommunications capacity will be increasingly important, however, as the Communications Branch and regional communications units shift more toward the directions as advocated: *managing* more of the overall communications function and doing *relatively* less of the actual communications work themselves.

Conclusions

The Communications Branch and most of the regions have a strong foundation in professional, dedicated staff. Departmental communications' capacity could be strengthened by managing the overall workload in ways that would allow communications staff to maintain and increase their professional qualifications and help policy and program staff and partners to assume an increasing share of the responsibility for effective communications.

Regions where communications staff do not have professional qualifications will need to rectify this situation.

Recommendations

9. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the regions, should develop a longer term training and skill development strategy combining formal and informal approaches, including staff rotations at and between/amongst headquarters and the regions.

10. The Director General of Communications should ensure that the longer term strategy takes account of the increasing need to manage communications relationships with partners and other government departments.

11. The Regional Directors General, in collaboration with the Director General of Communications, should define requirements for communications positions in the regions to take account not only of the need for strong general communications skills, but also for skills that can address the particularities of local conditions.

Systems and Procedures

Issue

The section deals with how to ensure that communications activities are guided and supported by established, understood procedures, protocols and related management techniques that promote efficiency, responsiveness and timeliness.

The approach was to identify the systems and procedures that were working well or not so well, to explore the reasons and consider options for improvement. In addition, the review team looked at element such as standard communications practices in the public sector, such as use of qualitative research as a way of improving the capacity of the Communications Branch and ensuring that it is well equipped to meet new challenges as they evolve.

Findings, Observations and Analysis

Ensuring a Firm Foundation for Systems and Procedures

As discussed under "Strategic Direction," the *1998-1999 Corporate Strategic Communications Plan* does not benefit from broad-based contributions of departmental staff, let alone from partners. Also, the plan was not reviewed, endorsed or promulgated by senior management.

The absence of an authoritative, practical plan complicates the development of authoritative systems and procedures that depend on it. It is difficult to design and implement effective systems and procedures if they need to assume, rather than refer to, communications goals and priorities.

Most departmental staff, including communications, policy and program staff, would welcome well-structured, regular opportunities to help them contribute to the department's goals and priorities as well as to their assessment. Most partners — notably Aboriginal partners — would also welcome similar opportunities. Such opportunities, such as providing communications personnel and/or Aboriginal partners with increased opportunities to interact and jointly plan activities could be most worthwhile.

While not specifically touched on in the regions, at headquarters there was a strong feeling that communications products were not always as well-written or as clear as they could be. While the federal government did implement a Plain Language initiative in 1990-1991, it was generally agreed by communications personnel that more attention needs to be paid to this important component of communications, particularly relating to direct communications with the general public. Proceeding gradually but consistently around language levels, vocabulary and clarify —

particularly as they relate to individual target audiences would be a prudent course. An effective Plain Language Initiative will increasingly become key as the Public Education component and other major public initiatives move forward.

Research and evaluation were two other components of a strong communications function which communications personnel thought could and should be strengthened. Most often mentioned were the need to focus test communications products with target audiences to ensure that they would meet their objectives and the institution of a more methodical evaluation of communications and information programs.

Defining the Authority of Regions

Closer to the operational end of the communications function, most representatives of the Aboriginal and mainstream media interviewed reported that, in most regions, the procedures for obtaining information from and arranging for interviews with departmental staff was very time-consuming, bureaucratic and therefore led to poor relations with the department. Media representatives typically speculated that the cumbersome procedures were the product of excessive caution prompted by historical difficulties. They suggested that improved systems governing communications with the media could go a long way to improving the overall relationship between the department and the media.

The delineation of authority between headquarters and the regions — whether it concerns communications or other matters — is a classic issue in public administration, and this usually means that there are no easy answers. Nonetheless, a pragmatic approach, focussed on concrete issues such as approval processes for press releases and other more or less routine documents could be help to improve specific systems and procedures as well as contributing to improvements in the overall relationship between the regions and headquarters on communications issues.

Streamlining Sign-off Procedures

Since this review began, the Communications Branch has developed and is implementing its first Media Relations Strategy. While the review team have not had an opportunity to review this document, its existence and the implementation of strategic directions with and for the media, will undoubtedly improve on-going relationships with what is a key component for departmental communications —the media. Streamlined approval processes should help to establish effective relations with media by recognizing the tight deadlines that characterize their work and the need to be able to communicate with authoritative spokespersons.

Similar comments were made by regional communications staff concerning approval processes for press releases, speeches, proposed letters to the editor and the like. Here again, the criticism was that the processes involved too many sign-offs and not enough feedback, particularly when changes were made. Regional staff were also critical of insensitivity by headquarters to

agreements such as those concerning press releases negotiated with local chiefs. Staff reported that such agreements were often ignored and press releases were changed unilaterally by headquarters.

This said, minimal sign-offs are required as a foundation for ministerial accountability — the foundation of democratic government in Canada. Approvals should take into account both program sign off and Communications Branch sign-off, but downward delegation for "routine" items should be encouraged. By de-layering the approval processes, both a great deal of unproductive time will be saved and DIAND staff will be spared large amounts of frustration. Most persons interviewed interpreted problems such as those discussed above as a reflection of inadequate and/or inappropriate delineation of regional authority.

The need to develop effective communications partnerships with Aboriginal groups provides a good opportunity to reinforce the simplification of the approval processes noted above. The need to work with Aboriginal groups and partners in a way that is mutually beneficial and as non-bureaucratic as possible, should help to clarify and streamline departmental systems and procedures.

Conclusions

Efforts to strengthen the formal planning and coordination processes for the communications function across headquarters and the regions have been undertaken recently and should be continued with more involvement of policy and program managers, as well as partners. More emphasis could also be given to evaluation programs for communications.

A pragmatic approach, focussed on concrete issues such as approval processes for press releases and other routine documents could help to improve specific systems and procedures as well as contributing to improvements in the overall relationship between the regions and headquarters on communications issues.

Recommendations

12. The Director General of Communications should establish mechanisms to engage communications personnel, other departmental managers and stakeholders in planning, coordination and evaluation processes on an ongoing basis, reflecting the commitment to partnerships and shared responsibility for communications within the department and the federal government.

13. The Director General of Communications should simplify the approval processes for the following generic products: press releases; speeches and speaking notes; and routine, non-controversial publications, where the Minister is not directly implicated.

14. The Director General of Communications should consider allowing the regions to issue their own press releases in circumstances where the Minister is not directly involved (funding for ongoing community operations etc.) and where press coverage is traditionally local, rather than high-profile regional or national.

15. The Director General of Communications should encourage the regions to provide more informal briefings for local media, thus obviating the need for as many press releases to support establishing closer relationships with the media and a more personal, less bureaucratic approach to proactive media relations.

16. The Director General of Communications should clarify, in advance, the scope and sign off (approvals) frameworks for all joint communications activities or products undertaken with Aboriginal partners.

17. The Director General of Communications should introduce, in consultation with the regions, more systematic, proactive research, such as focus groups, with target groups prior to developing or finalizing communications products, messaging and approaches.

18. The Director General of Communications should build in evaluation criteria or frameworks for communications programs to assess their impact, resource utilization and cost-effectiveness.

Organization and Resources

Issue

The issue is whether the Communications Branch and the regional communications units are adequately organized and resourced to fulfill their mandates as reflected in departmental and regional goals and priorities, and as elaborated in the department's communications business lines. The mandate of the Communications Branch includes the management of the communications function for the department as a whole, not just activities which it manages directly. Similarly, the mandate of the regional communications units includes management of the communications function as it applies to their region.

There is no perfect or even ideal structure because structures are means to achieve goals. Goals and the means for achieving them may change significantly in the light of such factors as changes in governmental or departmental objectives, or changes in staff and partners. This said, good structures are generally logical and support clear direction, coordination and accountability.

The review team's mandate did not include carrying out the kinds of detailed measurement and analysis that could support firm conclusions about the adequacy of resources. It relied almost exclusively on information from interviews inside and outside the department, workshops and an analysis of documentation. Whether resources are adequate depends, of course, on how they are

managed. Since the communications function is carried out not only by departmental communications staff, but also by policy and program staff and partners, there is scope to harness resources outside the Communications Branch and regional communications units to pursue departmental goals.

Findings, Observations and Analysis

"Lining Up" with the Minister's Office

Noting that the Minister is the primary client of the Communications Branch, a significant number of persons interviewed inside and outside the department questioned the differences between the organization of the Minister's Office along regional lines and the organization of the branch along functional lines.

There can be no doubt that the branch must be able to meet the Minister's needs for communications advice and support. In some smaller departments with arguably less complex communications mandates, it may be possible to make major adjustments to the structure of their communications branches so that they correspond more closely to the varying structures of successive Ministers' Offices. In DIAND's case, particularly at this juncture, the Communications Branch needs greater stability than it currently enjoys, and this includes structural stability. It does not look like a major structural adjustment designed *solely* to conform to the current organization of the Minister's Office would necessarily lead to improved service to the Minister or to overall improved performance. The inevitable instability and temporary reduction in productivity associated with a major structural change would probably outweigh any potential benefits.

The regions could have greater authority for the management of the communications function as it concerns them, if strategic direction is strengthened as recommended. This would mean that the Minister's Office could rely on the regions for communications support to an even greater extent than is now the case, without compromising coherence in the management of the overall communications function.

Since the Minister is the primary client of the Communications Branch, it would be useful for the branch to routinely explore with the Minister's Office ways to improve service and performance. Such a routine approach to "continuous improvement" would be desirable

Staying with the Current Structure

A clear majority of interviewees inside and outside the department thought that the basic division of the Communications Branch into strategic and operational/service sides has considerable merit because it reflects the different skill sets, working situations and relationships of the two directorates. At the same time, some staff within the branch expressed concern that the current

division may promote "dual solitudes" and hinder coordination, sharing of skills and opportunities for establishing joint working teams on the many projects that involve both directorates.

The basic division of the branch into two directorates is logical, provides for clear direction and accountability and does not need to be changed. Increased coordination, sharing skills and teamwork should be pursued through various management devices such as more joint planning, joint project teams and workshops to explore new ways to collaborate.

As indicated in the section on Staff Skills, Tools and Capacities, however, the nature of each of the directorates — particularly the Strategic Planning Directorate — could become quite different over the medium term. Evolving relationships with partners, policy and program staff, greater authority of the regions within a strengthened strategic directions framework, and a more elaborated northern affairs communications strategy are among the factors that could lead to changes. The changes could include greater emphasis on strategic planning functions, management of partnerships, and a wider range of advice and other support to the regions, policy and program staff.

Raising the Profile of the Head of the Communications Branch

Many communications staff thought that the head of the Communications Branch should report directly to the Deputy Minister because this would give the branch more visibility and authority. A smaller number of communications staff and several senior policy and program managers indicated that they saw the merits of having the department's principal policy and communications function under one Assistant Deputy Minister.

The review team understands and respects the need for the Deputy Minister to have as much flexibility as possible to organize the department's senior management as he/she thinks best. It also recognizes that one of the most common challenges in managing the policy and communications functions is how to delineate their respective responsibilities, and that this can lead to the suggestion of placing both functions under one executive.

Effective communications is a prerequisite to a fundamental role of the department — cultivating and maintaining satisfactory relationships between the department and Aboriginal peoples (particularly First Nations and Inuit) and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of Canada. This suggests that the communications function needs to be managed under the close direction of the Deputy Minister, with the executive responsible for managing the function being directly accountable to the Deputy Minister. The head of the Communications Branch needs to be seen as the department's principal advisor on the communications function and the equal of the other members at the senior management table.

Raising the Profile of the Communications Function in the Regions

There are two main aspects to raising the profile of the communications function in the regions. First, as already recommended, the regions should have more authority to manage the communications function in their sphere of responsibility — in accordance with the kind of agreed goals and priorities that would underpin strengthened strategic direction. Second, the communications services units should have greater capacity and authority to manage the communications function, including those aspects undertaken by policy and program staff.

One of the most common recommendations from communications staff in the majority of regions where they were part of the executive services group was to have the head of the communications unit report directly to the Regional Director General. This recommendation was made even though the managers responsible for communications who do not report to the Regional Director General routinely attend regional senior management committee meetings.

The objective of this sort of recommendation is sensible, but it does not necessarily need to be implemented by having the regional head of communications report to the Regional Director General. The key consideration is whether the head of the communications unit is in a position to manage the overall communications function in the region effectively, with good support from the Regional Director General.

In all regions, the manager of communications and most communications staff work in close proximity to the Regional Director General's/Associate Regional Director General's Offices and have ready, direct access to them. Given the potential contribution of effective executive services to a good communications function, there is merit in having a close relationship between the two functions.

Strengthening Ties Between Regional Communications Units and the Communications Branch

A variety of recommendations for mechanisms to improve the relationships between the Communications Branch and regional communications staff were made. Examples include more frequent and/or longer meetings between the groups, along the lines of the semi-annual meetings that have been organized in recent years, and more staff visits and exchanges in both directions.

The challenges of providing functional guidance or direction from the Communication Branch to the regions are basically no different from those associated with any other comparable headquarters/regional functional relationship. Exploring structural solutions to this challenge are not likely to be profitable. A combination of strengthened strategic direction, as discussed earlier, and the implementation of recommendations along the lines mentioned above would be more effective in strengthening ties between regional communications units and Communications Branch.

Making More Strategic Use of Resources

The review team saw a good deal of evidence, particularly in the Communications Branch, of overwork and burnout, as reflected in reports of extended sick leave, requests for transfers and staff-initiated moves to other branches and departments. At the same time, there is a good deal of evidence of hard work, professionalism and dedication, as reflected in the comments and attitudes that staff conveyed during interviews and workshops and the comments from non-communications staff in the department, including the Minister's Office.

The review team did not assess whether more resources should be allocated to the Communications Branch. Some communications units in regions have resource levels that are below the regional average. Even if the case for additional resources could be clearly substantiated, however, any strategy for ensuring the adequacy of communications resources needs to focus on clarifying objectives and priorities, shifting more responsibility for communications activities to policy and program staff, enlisting the support of partners, particularly for communications about the department's programs and services.

One observation from several senior managers inside and outside the department is to institute a rigorous process for requiring policy and program managers to identify and supply adequate communications resources to support the launch and ongoing implementation of new and expanded policy and program initiatives. In some other departments, this has been successfully done by identifying and requesting such resources early on in the development of new policies/programs, often at the stage when Memoranda to Cabinet are drafted.

Conclusions

The current organization of the Communications Branch should be satisfactory for carrying out its current and foreseeable responsibilities, including those arising out of *Gathering Strength*. Major changes to the basic two-directorate structure should be entertained only after careful consideration because the branch needs more overall stability than it currently enjoys.

The profile of the communications function should be raised because of its special importance to the department.

Resources allocated to the Communications Branch and to some regional communications units may be less than adequate to meet current responsibilities, but if additional resources are supplied this should be done in the light of clearer communications goals and a more appropriate sharing of responsibilities between departmental communications staff on the one hand and partners, policy and program staff on the other.

Recommendations

19. The Director General of Communications should initiate discussion with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Policy and Strategic Direction, and other ADMs, regarding the possibility of making the head of the Communications Branch directly accountable to the Deputy Minister.

20. The Director General of Communications should suggest to senior management a requirement that all proposals for new or expanded programs, projects and similar initiatives be accompanied with an estimate of the demand on communications resources and, when required, an identification of the source of additional funding.

Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Review of the Communications Function

Background: The Communications function is to inform DIAND's client groups of the department's policies, programs, services and activities; develop strategies; and provide advice on the communication of ministerial and departmental policies, programs and initiatives, as well as provide a collection of communications services for the department.

In recent years, significant changes in the nature of the department's activities and mandate, and its roles and responsibilities toward its aboriginal partners have occurred. These shifts have placed heavy demands on the communications function, and they require that this new way of doing business be effectively communicated to a wide variety of audiences.

The continuing importance of strong communications in achieving corporate — and indeed federal — objectives is further underlined as the government embarks on a new approach to dealing with issues of concern to Aboriginal people, one that emphasizes more efficient, integrated, interdepartmental collaboration.

In 1996, Communications Branch in headquarters was mandated with the responsibility to develop and implement two priority corporate and ministerial strategies : public education and corporate incident management. In addition to this, two new functions (contracting and distribution/mailing lists) were added to the Communications Services Management Directorate. These new functions have a major impact on the regions and headquarters and the way communications do business. To be successful, all of these activities are entirely dependent upon strong, dedicated capacity — both in terms of human and fiscal resources — at the regional and headquarters levels.

Need: Given the realities of limited fiscal and human resources, there is an immediate requirement for a critical review of the various activities currently being performed by communications officers to ensure the most effective and efficient support to the organization.

Scope: The overall function is a shared responsibility between headquarters and the regions. In order to provide a comprehensive overview of the departmental situation, regions will be asked to participate in the study.

The review will be carried out within headquarters (to include both the Strategic Communications, Planning and Public Affairs and Communications Services Management Directorates of the Communications Branch) as well as within each of the department's nine regional communications services, Indian Oil and Gas Canada (IOCG) and Federal Treaty Negotiations Office (FTNO).

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Issues: The review will address, but is not limited to, the following issues :

- What is the current structure of the corporate communications function in headquarters and in the regions?
  - what are the current business lines?
  - what are the clients' expectations of the services provided?
  - what is the structure of the organization?
  - are resources in line with the requirements?
  - is the function structured and organized to meet client needs?
  - is the structure in line with DIAND's vision?
  - is the structure in line with the government-wide vision?
  - is the exercise of the function consistent or compatible across headquarters and the regions?
- What is the current state of affairs in the Communications Branch and in the regions?
  - what is the workload of the staff and how is it distributed? do people have the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to support the achievement of the departmental objectives?
  - is internal communication within the branch and within each region adequate?
  - is internal communication between headquarters and regions adequate?
- Are Communications Branch and the regions in a position to meet the challenges resulting from the major shift in DIAND's management culture — devolution, partnership, La Relève, Leadership initiative, risk management?
- How can Communications Branch and the regions be better equipped to deal with the numerous challenges they are facing. For example:
  - how can they manage and coordinate projects and other interactions relating to ministerial priority and corporate demands, and how can they ensure that they are appropriately assigned and implemented?
  - how effective are the communications practices, processes, policies and procedures within headquarters and regions?
  - how can Communications Branch reconcile the needs of its clients to be satisfied within pre-established policies and standards?

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- what general capacities (including access to appropriate resources) and expertise exist within headquarters and regional communications organizations to respond to corporate and ministerial demands?

- what additional capacities are required?

- Are there any structural improvements required for Communications Branch and the regions to more effectively address and respond to current needs and to anticipate future needs?

Approach: It is proposed to adopt a review process based on the principles of consultation and participation together with quantitative and qualitative research method for the achievement of concrete, visible results. The project will be initiated by an Audit Manager from the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch (DAEB) with the assistance of the consultants. The selection of the firm will be done by the Review Manager in consultation with the Communications Branch.

The review will be conducted in four phases as follows:

Planning/Orientation Phase

The planning phase establishes the framework for the project. It clarifies the mandate, the objectives, the scope and expected results. This phase entails studying the organizational charts, mapping of the current situation, performing an environmental scan of expectations for the future in terms of services, clients needs, evolution of the activities, and delegation.

The object of this phase is for the review team to reach a common understanding of the orientation and the methodology of the project. The members of the team clarify the methodology, the appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods and the nature of the sampling where applicable to produce an activity plan.

Gathering/Conduct Phase

During this phase the review team carries-out the plan developed earlier. Activities include individual interviews and group meetings; group sessions led by a professional facilitator, review of records and processes; and all other necessary research and gathering information. Communications Branch staff, clients and regional stakeholders will be included in the information gathering phase.

Analysis Phase

Once the information has been gathered, the review team analyses the data and clarifies issues such as:

- what is the current state of affairs, compared to where we need to go?
- what are the gaps?
- suggestions for filling the gaps and improve the capacity of Communications Branch to respond to future needs — structure, resource levels, optimum combination of internal and external resources, delegation.
- Identification of key business lines and priorities and how to resource these.
- this information will be presented to a group of representatives during a one to two days national workshop led by trained facilitators. The group will validate the data, propose recommendations, and develop the framework of a work plan for implementation.

Report Phase

The purpose of the report phase is to incorporate all information and recommendations gathered during the course of the review into a concise format. This includes results of analysis and proposed structural changes if needed and work plan for implementation.

Resource: The work will be undertaken both in-house and with the use of consultants. The costs to be incurred in the contracting of this project are to be shared equally between the Communications Branch and the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch.

Costs: The estimated costs for the contracted resources are $70,000.

Time frame: The planning/orientation phase will commence in September 1997, and the project should be completed before March 31, 1998.

Approved by :

Gordon Shanks
Assistant Deputy Minister
Policy and Strategic Direction
September 12, 1997

Action Plan

AUDIT AND EVALUATION / VÉRIFICATION INTERNE ET ÉVALUATION

REQUEST FOR ACTION PLAN / DEMANDE DE PLAN D'ACTION

PROJECT / PROJET : 97/22

PROJECT TITLE / TITRE DU PROJET : Review of the Communications Function
REGION OR SECTOR / RÉGION OU SECTEUR : Communications Branch

(1) RECOMMENDATIONS / RECOMMANDATIONS	(2) REPORT / RAPPORT PAGE NO.	(3) ACTION PLAN / PLAN D'ACTION	(4) RESPONSIBLE MANAGER / GESTIONNAIRE RESPONSABLE (TITLE / TITRE)	(5) PLANNED IMPLEMENTATION DATE / DATE PREVUE DE MISE EN OEUVRE
1. The Director General of Communications should establish regular processes — conducted at least once a year, under the direction of senior management — for:	21	The annual Corporate Strategic Communications Plan (1999-2000) and related drafting process is intended to:		
a) Ascertaining and influencing the government's communications objectives and priorities (e.g., through a combination of strengthened interdepartmental mechanisms and by proposing communications goals and strategies to PCO/PMO).		a) Influence the government's communications objectives	Director General, Communications (Director, Communications Operations; Director, Strategic Planning; Director, Communications Services)	– Speech from the Throne (SFT) completed; – Ad Hoc presentation to be scheduled (Nov) – interdepartmental to be scheduled (Dec) December 31, 1999
b) Involving communications, policy and program staff at headquarters (including the Minister's Office) and regions, in the formulation of DIAND's communications goals in the light of overall departmental goals and priorities and the government's overall communications goals and priorities.		b) Involve headquarters and regional communications staff, the Minister's Office, the Deputies and Senior Management in agreeing to communications goals and messaging. Information and planning sessions with communications, policy and program staff at headquarters, the MO and regions have been and are ongoing in the current formulation of DIAND's and the government's overall communications goals and communications plans. Advice and information are sought and exchanged on a regular basis.	Director General, Communications (Director, Strategic Planning)	Series of headquarters and regional workouts & presentations completed by December 31, 1999

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1. Continued ...				
c) Involving partners and clients in the formulation of communications goals.		c) Implementation has already started with clients. Need to define how non-departmental/non-government partners can be involved and to what degree. Ongoing activity	Director General, Communications (Director, Strategic Planning; Director, Communications Operations)	Process established December 31, 1999
d) Approving, promulgating and operationalizing the department's communications goals and priorities.		d) Series of headquarters/regional presentations; Communications Issues Committee updates.	Director General, Communications	Completed September 30, 1999
e) Assessing achievement of agreed goals and priorities, in consultation with partners, in light of agreed criteria.		e) Assess achievement of agreed goals in consultation with partners. Ongoing activity	Director General, Communications (Director Strategic Planning; Director Communications Operations)	Process established December 31, 1999
f) Providing the basis for assessing annually the contribution of staff involved with the communications function to the achievement of the department's communications goals.		f) Workplace assessment of Communications Branch undertaken summer of 1999. Joint management and employee working group currently drafting an action plan.	Director General, Communications	To be implemented by April 1, 2000

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2. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with senior management and the Minister's Office, should establish priorities among business lines clearly linked to departmental communications goals.	26	The Director General has undertaken a reorganization of the Communications Branch, reinforcing internal communications, media relations and emerging issues tracking capacities; creating a Strategic Planning Directorate; and re-aligning Units in the Operations Directorate to provide better horizontal communications management support to corporate priorities.	Director General, Communications	Completed June 30, 1999

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3. The Director General of Communications should revisit the branch mandate with respect to contract management, the Web site and incident management to determine if these are appropriate business lines for the branch or should be handled elsewhere.	26	Communications Branch in the past year has improved our contract management service in house. This is important as PWGSC is off-loading service for communications contracting work and delegating authority to departments to issue low value contracts for communications services. DIAND Contracting Services does not want to take on this work as it requires specialized knowledge and lots of last minute urgent requests. Recently, PWGSC, noted that the idea of a contract management officer in a Communications Branch is an excellent idea and that all Communications branches should have them. Web site management will be investigated further, but is currently working well with good interaction between Corporate Services and Communications.	Director, Communications Services	November 30, 2000
		The role of Communications Branch relating to emerging issues is being redefined. Both DMO and the Departmental Secretariat are involved in the review. A new approach is being developed for discussion with Senior Managers.	Director, Communications Operations	November 30, 1999

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4. The Director General of Communications, in consultation/collaboration with programs at headquarters and the regions, and with Aboriginal and northern partners, should develop a clear vision for the public education function, with goals, planning and evaluation processes, resourcing priorities/criteria, and related delivery and coordination mechanisms.	27	An Aboriginal Public Education Committee, composed of prominent Aboriginal, Northern and non-Aboriginal persons has been established to help guide the creation of a vision for the public education function. Headquarters and regional personnel are involved in planning, approving and delivering public education programming. The Director General, Communications and the Director, Strategic Planning are actively seeking human and financial resources to continue public education programming. *Gathering Strength* funding for public education sunsets at the end of this fiscal year and new sources of funding have yet to be identified.	Director, Strategic Planning	The Director, Strategic Planning will conduct a review of the public education function and its resourcing in winter of 1999-2000 and present a plan after completion of that review. June 30, 2000
5. The Director General of Communications should develop a strategy and supporting information materials to actively communicate the roles and services of the communications function to departmental, Aboriginal, northern and other partners and stakeholders, emphasizing the full range of services, the importance of timely and effective collaboration in communications planning, and basic protocols and procedures to support effective partnerships. These materials should be supported with clear, factual examples of positive results/success stories, and articulation of the key ingredients for successful partnerships in communications planning and design.	36	Presentations on Communications roles and services have been developed. Presentation to sectors and regions as well as development of protocols and procedures are being scheduled. The next step is to adapt these materials to Aboriginal partners. Success stories on communications' partnerships are being collected with the support of regional offices and will serve as a reference to define criteria for ensuring successful partnerships.	Director General, Communications (Director, Communications Operations; Director, Strategic Planning; Director, Communications Services)	March 31, 2000

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6. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the regions, should increase the number of opportunities for face-to-face interaction between headquarters and regional staff to share experience and expertise.	36	Being implemented. Regions are participating in bi-weekly teleconferences, quarterly communications meetings and workouts on specific issues or protocols. Both regions and headquarters are looking at potential opportunities to have employee exchanges as part of their training plans. Ongoing activity	Director, Communications Operations	Process established December 31, 1999
7. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the programs at headquarters and the regions, should clarify the roles and responsibilities of headquarters, regional communications and program staff with respect to carrying out the communications function within DIAND.	36	To develop communications' protocols with all regional offices and sectors.	Director, Communications Operations	July 31, 2000 Ontario, NWT Regions and CIG Sector - Protocols developed as of October 21, 1999
8. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the programs at headquarters and the regions, and with Aboriginal partners, should clarify relationships with Aboriginal organizations and stakeholders particularly with respect of what is meant by "partnership" as it relates to the communications mandate. This would include a common understanding of areas of collaboration and areas of independence.	36	The Communications Branch will participate in defining and clarifying "partnership" relationships with Aboriginal organizations and stakeholders. However, this cannot be accomplished in the absence of an overall DIAND framework, which is yet to be developed.	Director, Strategic Planning	December 30, 2000

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9. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the regions, should develop a longer term training and skill development strategy combining formal and informal approaches, including staff rotations at and between/amongst headquarters and the regions.	39	The Director General has committed to branch staff and regional communications managers that he will initiate and maintain an inventory of appropriate courses to be undertaken by departmental communications officers. A survey of training needs will also be undertaken in conjunction with the LLST. The Director General participates in a PCO Communications led Committee to develop training courses (ie., polling) for Government of Canada Communications Officers.	Director General, Communications	March 31, 2000
10. The Director General of Communications should ensure that the longer term strategy takes account of the increasing need to manage communications relationships with partners and other government departments.	39	The Director, Strategic Planning, has proposed creating positions at the manager's level to build and maintain relationships in the following areas: Aboriginal Relations; Intra departmental and OGD Relations and Private Sector and Provincial Relations and Partnership. PSD and Human Resources cooperation are required to put these positions in place.	Director, Strategic Planning	December 31, 2000
11. The Regional Directors General, in collaboration with the Director General of Communications, should define requirements for communications positions in the regions to take account not only of the need for strong general communications skills, but also for skills that can address the particularities of local conditions.	39	Consistent with activities to be undertaken under recommendation #9, the Director General Communications will conduct a series of one-on-one discussions with all Regional Director Generals to determine requirements for communications positions specific to each region.	Director General, Communications	March 31, 2000

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12. The Director General of Communications should establish mechanisms to engage communications personnel, other departmental managers and stakeholders in planning, coordination and evaluation processes on an ongoing basis, reflecting the commitment to partnerships and shared responsibility for communications within the department and the federal government.	42	The Communications Branch issues two annual reports. A Communications Products, Practices and Procedures manual is revised each year and distributed to all Communications Officers across the department. The manual provides direction on a consistent approach to departmental communications as well as government-wide guidelines on advertising, publishing, official languages and "common look and feel". The branch, last year, also launched an "Annual Report" issued to all departmental staff. This document outlines major accomplishments from the year and an overview of how departmental staff can engage Communications support. (Also see response to recommendation #1).	Director General, Communications	Completed September 30, 1999
13. The Director General of Communications should simplify the approval processes for the following generic products: press releases; speeches and speaking notes; and routine, non-controversial publications, where the Minister is not directly implicated.	42	The approval process is being reviewed as part of the "alternative to news releases" project which was discussed at the Communications Issues Committee in September 1999. This also deals with concerns raised in recommendation no. 14, 15 and 16.	Director, Communications Operations	November 30, 1999
14. The Director General of Communications should consider allowing the regions to issue their own press releases in circumstances where the Minister is not directly involved (funding for ongoing community operations etc.) and where press coverage is traditionally local, rather than high-profile regional or national.	43	See recommendation no. 13	Director, Communications Operations	November 30, 1999

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15. The Director General of Communications should encourage the regions to provide more informal briefings for local media, thus obviating the need for as many press releases to support establishing closer relationships with the media and a more personal, less bureaucratic approach to proactive media relations.	43	See recommendation no. 13	Director, Communications Operations	November 30, 1999
16. The Director General of Communications should clarify, in advance, the scope and sign off (approvals) frameworks for all joint communications activities or products undertaken with Aboriginal partners.	43	See recommendation no. 13	Director, Communications Operations	November 30, 1999
17. The Director General of Communications, in consultation with the regions, should introduce more systematic, proactive research, such as focus groups, with target groups prior to developing or finalizing communications products, messaging and approaches.	43	Significant research in the form of departmental polling, focus group testing and participation in syndicated polling in support of communications products and planning is actively underway. Results have had a strong impact on communications planning. Such activities are costly and at present are being cash-managed with no departmental commitment of continued funding. (On-going)	Director, Strategic Planning	Ongoing as outlined in Annual Strategic Communications Plans Process established December 31, 1999

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18. The Director General of Communications should build in evaluation criteria or frameworks for communications programs to assess their impact, resource utilization and cost-effectiveness.	43	Once Communications Branch is fully staffed and, if the branch receives appropriate resources, more detailed evaluations of communications programs will be undertaken.	Director, Communications Services	To be reviewed after one year. December 31, 2000
19. The Director General of Communications should initiate discussion with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Policy and Strategic Direction, and other ADMs, regarding the possibility of making the head of the Communications Branch directly accountable to the Deputy Minister.	48	The Director General will undertake to assess his reporting relationship to the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister of Policy and Strategic Direction. While a formal reporting relationship between the two currently exists, the Director General works in a matrix environment reporting to the SADM, Associate Deputy Minister and Deputy Minister on any given file, and provides communications services directly to other ADMs and Regional Director Generals independent of the SADM PSD.	Director General, Communications	December 31, 1999
20. The Director General of Communications should suggest to senior management a requirement that all proposals for new or expanded programs, projects and similar initiatives be accompanied with an estimate of the demand on communications resources and, when required, an identification of the source of additional resources funding.	48	Under the direction of the Director General, Communications, a Deck for presentation to CIC and sector and regional management groups is currently being drafted to complement the recent "Annual Report" and outline communications services, products and budget requirements and processes. The Director General Communications and ADM-CS are also discussing an approach to Communications funding from departmental initial allocations beginning fiscal 2000-2001.	Director General, Communication	January 31, 2000